SACRED ALLEGORIES

BY THE

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LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.

39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON

NEW YORK AND BOMBAY

1897

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THE KING'S MESSENGERS .

THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS.

'*And He said to them all, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.*'

ST. LUKE IX. 23



WAYWARD IN THE WOOD (SEE P. 10

CHAPTER I.

Old friends, old scenes, will lovelier be
As more of heaven in each we see:
Some softening gleam of love and prayer
Shall dawn on every cross and care.

A THICK darkness was spread over the earth, as I stood on the top of a lofty mountain, and the only object that I could see was the sun, which had risen in the far east with a wonderful glory. It was as a ball of clear and living fire; and yet so soft and chastened was its ray, that, while I gazed, my eye was not dazzled, and I felt I should love to look upon it for ever. Presently, as it shone upon the mists which rested on the earth, they became tremulous with light, and in a moment they floated by, and a scene of life and beauty was opened to my view.

I saw a spot of ground so rich and fertile that it well might be called a garden;—the sweetest flowers were growing wild in the fields, and the very pathways appeared to

sparkle with rubies and emeralds; there were, too, the most luxuriant orchards and cool groves of orange-trees and myrtles, and the breeze of the morning was playing among their branches. Now, as I watched the butterflies that fluttered over the flowers, and the lambs sporting on the smooth grass, and as I listened to the song of the nightingales in the woods, I fancied it was some scene of enchantment which I saw, it was so very full of happiness and life. Everywhere, at the extremity of the view, my eye rested on a clear narrow stream: I could trace neither mountain from which it rose, nor ocean into which it fell; but it glided round and round in an endless circular course, forming as it were a border of silver to that lovely garden on which the sun was shining. The morning light ever kept adding fresh beauty to each tree and flower on which it fell, but the brightest and clearest rays were those which were reflected by this narrow stream: and at this I wondered the rather because, on the other side of the ring of water, all was still wrapt in a thick and gloomy fog, and though I gazed long and earnestly, I saw nothing.

Young and lovely children were continually crossing the narrow stream; there was no other way of escaping from the land of darkness to the land of light. Their garments became white as snow by their passage through the water, and sparkled with a dazzling brightness as the sun first shone upon them; I observed, too, that each child, as he entered the garden, held a little cross in his hand. Now, when I reflected how many millions might still be wandering in the dark and gloomy region beyond, on whom the



THE GARDEN OF THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS (SEE P. 8)

glorious sun would never shed its cheering warmth, I could not help thinking how happy the children were to have found thus early the narrow stream; and I said in my heart, Surely this lovely garden was made for them, and they will live in it for ever.

While I was musing thus, it seemed that, in answer, a still soft Voice came floating on the breeze, and said, "It is indeed for such children as these that the sun is shining, and for them that the mists have been cleared away, but none of the beautiful things in the garden belong to them; they are waiting here as strangers, till their Father shall summon them home; and when they go hence, they can take nothing away with them but the little crosses in their hands, and the white garments which they wear." "Who, then, are these children?" I asked, "and what is the name of the garden? and when they are taken from it, whither will they go?" And the Voice said, "The children are sons of a mighty King, and the garden is called the Garden of THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS; but no one can tell whither each child will go when he is taken away: it will depend on how far he escapes the dangers of the garden. If they carelessly lose their crosses, or so stain their beautiful garments, that they can be made white no more, they will be thought unworthy of the presence of the great King, and will be hid in an outer darkness, more thick and terrible than that which they have just left. But if, when they go away, the crosses are still in their hands, and they so far keep themselves clean that the King may recognise them for His own children, then will their garments be washed until they be-

come more shining white than snow, and they will be taken to a brighter and happier land, in which they will live with their Father for ever."

But I understood not what the Voice meant by the dangers of the garden, and I wondered, too, that it should speak to me of a brighter and happier land; for I thought within myself, that no land could be more beautiful than that on which I gazed, and no sun more glorious than that which was shining there. And the Voice again answered my thoughts, and said, "It is indeed sure, that no sun surpasseth in glory that which is shining on the land encircled by the silver stream; but were it not for the light so resting upon it, there is nothing to be desired in the garden itself. At one time everything, not only here, but in the country around, was very good—there was no mist or darkness then; but now an enemy of the King has corrupted all. The very air the children breathe is wont to sully their white garments, and each delight of the garden is full of hidden danger and deceit. While everything appears to the eye so beautiful and innocent, there is, in truth, a poison lurking in each fruit and flower; cunning serpents are hiding in the grass; snares and stumbling-blocks innumerable are placed in the broad ways that look so bright and smooth; and even in the groves of myrtle roaring lions are wandering about, anxious to tear the children that come thither, and to stain their white garments with blood."

And when I heard this, I wept bitterly for the poor children, whom I had thought so happy before, and I said,

"Oh, wretched children, thus to be placed in a garden so full of dangers, and to be tempted by fruits and flowers which you dare not gather! Surely there is not one of you who will not at last imbibe some secret poison, or fall into some dreadful snare, or be stung by a serpent, or torn by a lion: and so you will be prevented from entering that better country which your Father has prepared for you." And the Voice said, "There is not one of the King's children who may not dwell in peace and happiness in the garden. Not only is their Father Himself ever present with them, though they cannot see Him, but He has given to each a talisman, which will enable them to live here in security, and even to enjoy the fruits and flowers, until it is His good pleasure to call them to Himself. You see that the sun is shining brightly and gloriously in the east; you see, too, that each little one has been provided with a cross:—so long then as the cross is so held that the rays of the sun fall upon it, and cast a shadow on the surrounding objects, they will remain safe and happy in their garden: for every fruit on which the mark of the cross is seen, may be tasted of without fear, and each path may be trodden in safety on which its shadow rests."

"But will not," I asked, "the hands of the children become wearied by holding the cross, and their eyes grow dim while they watch the shadows?" And the Voice replied, "Their hands would indeed soon become weary, and their eyes grow dim, if their sight or their strength were their own; but these are among the number of those precious gifts that each child, as he crossed the stream, received from

his Father. He is ever at hand to watch over them; and, so long as they are really anxious to be guided by the cross, He will not suffer their sight or strength to fail. Nay, more, He has appointed means, by which they themselves may seek the renewal of these gifts day after day, and hour after hour."

When I heard this I wept no more, but I thought how good and kind that Father must be, who took such care of each little child. From this time I ceased to watch the trees and the flowers, or even the bright ring of water that kept flowing round the garden; for I felt deeply interested about the King's children, and I fancied it would be very beautiful to see them throwing shadows from their little crosses, and so living unhurt in the garden of the Shadow of the Cross.

Now, I had expected that, as there was no difference in the crosses themselves, so, too, would there be none in the shadows, and that every child who held the cross would make the same use of it. But I soon found that, though the crosses were indeed all alike, there was very great variety in the images which they cast. There were some which were very dark and gloomy, and some, on the contrary, were so fair and soft, that they were more beautiful to look upon than the surrounding light; some fell fixed and steadfast, some faint and wavering; some fell in clusters, and some alone. There was also a very great difference in the way in which the children held their crosses: some merely raised them on high, and then walked quietly wherever the shadow fell; some kept twisting them backwards and forwards, as

though it were a work of much difficulty to form the shadow; and some, methought, even when the image was most distinct, were unable to see it. Many, too, there were who hid their crosses, and only used them now and then, and I knew that those poor children were in continual danger; and some, too, had thrown them away altogether, and I feared that they would be lost. At length my eye grew weary with the confusion of the scene, and I resolved to fix it steadily on some one child, and to watch its progress through the garden. One little girl there was amidst a group of children, with features so pure and lovely, that, when she had once attracted my attention, I could easily distinguish her from the rest. The name of "Innocence" was written on her forehead; and, from the whiteness of her garments, I thought that she must have entered very lately into the garden. I watched her as she played with her companions in the fields, and I loved to see her stop with them to taste the fruits or gather the flowers by the way; for I observed that she chose not the greenest paths, nor the ripest fruits, nor the fairest flowers, but only those on which the image of her cross was seen. Nay, neither fruit nor flower seemed to have any charms for her, unless the cross had thrown its shadow there: and I wondered not that it was so, for the more I gazed, the more soft and beautiful seemed the outline that it traced. The child was always happy; her sole pleasure was in her little cross and the shadows it formed; fall where they would, she was sure to follow them. I saw, too, that she taught her friends to seek the shadows also, and when the mark of her cross and theirs might

be discerned on the same object, then was she happiest of all.

And as I gazed, behold! a snow-white dove was resting on the cross, and the form of the little one began already to fade from my view; her features became less bright, though not less pure, than they were before, and I knew that young Innocence, with her garments still white, was passing away from the garden. In a little while her companions were weeping, and the child was gone. I did not weep, for I felt she had been taken away to that brighter and happier land of which the Voice had spoken; yet long after we had ceased to see her, I fancied she was still present in the garden, and, as she had been wont to do, was holding her little cross in the light of the sun: for its shadow continued to play around all the objects she had loved; I could trace it not only on the faces of her friends, but on the flowers she had gathered, and the very pathways she had trod. I observed, too, that these images became brighter and more distinct from the tears that fell upon them, and images from other crosses kept clustering around them, and I thought, if the beautiful child were indeed still looking on the garden, how happy she must be that the crosses of those who wept for her were thus blended with her own.

CONVERSATION ON CHAPTER I.

Q. WHAT is signified by the bright and glorious sun that appeared in the east?

A. Jesus Christ our Lord.

Q. Yes; He is spoken of as the "Sun of Righteousness" by the prophet Malachi. And the beautiful garden on which its rays fell, is the Kingdom that our Lord established upon earth; now, why is that kingdom represented as surrounded by a silver stream?

A. Because it is through the water of baptism that we enter it.

Q. Do you remember how this was typified in the history of the children of Israel?

A. Yes; you explained to me in the Baptismal Service, that it was by the passage through the Red Sea. The words there, I think, are, "Who didst safely lead the children of Israel through the Red Sea, figuring thereby Thy holy baptism."

Q. You can, then, tell me on which side of the stream you were born.

A. In the land of darkness; for I was born in sin and a child of wrath.

Q. And when you were baptized, you were cleansed from your sin, and carried, as it were, through the clear stream in your garment of white, with your little cross in your hand. As soon as you thus entered the garden, you were made a member of Christ. Who then became your Father, and what inheritance was promised you?

A. Heaven was my inheritance, and God became my Father; for, at the same time that I was made a member of Christ, I became also a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven.

Q. Why are we told that neither the sight nor the strength of the children was their own?

A. Because we can do nothing except through the influence of the Holy Ghost.

Q. Why is it said that the children received these precious gifts as they crossed the stream?

A. Because it is at our Baptism that we receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Q. What, then, is signified by the constant renewal of their sight and strength?

A. The being daily renewed by the Holy Spirit of God.

Q. And how must we seek for such renewal?

A. By prayer.

Q. Yes, and by Holy Communion, and all the other means of grace which God has appointed to refresh and support the Christian in his daily walk. What is meant by

the children being placed in the garden, in order to prepare them for their Father's presence?

A. That the Christian is to endeavour so to live in the present world that hereafter he may be thought worthy to be with God for ever.

Q. How were the children to prepare themselves?

A. They were to keep their garments white, and hold fast their crosses.

Q. In the same way, then, each one of us must prepare himself for Heaven, by abstaining from sin and impurity, and holding fast the profession of Christ. Can you tell me how the sign of the cross is spoken of in the Baptismal Service?

A. As a token that hereafter we shall not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, and manfully to fight under His banner, against sin, the world, and the devil, and to continue Christ's faithful soldiers and servants unto our life's end.

Q. How are sin, the world, and the devil represented in the allegory?

A. They are the poisons, the snares, the serpents, and the other dangers of the garden.

Q. You are right. But, instead of fighting against them, we are here, under a different image, represented as passing safely through them by means of the shadow of the cross. What will be the fate of those unhappy children who neglect that safeguard?

A. When they leave the garden, they will never again behold the glorious Sun, but they will be cast into outer

darkness, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Q. Such in another world will be the punishment of the faithless followers of Christ. But now tell me how it was that, while the children were in the garden, there was so much variety in the shadows that fell from different crosses?

A. Is it because religion seems a bright and cheerful thing to some, while it is sad and gloomy to others?

Q. It is so. God has ordained that Christianity should shed, as it were, a different complexion on different minds, and that the course, which is easy and natural to one disposition, should be hard and laborious to another. There is one great cause of this variety, that will be explained in the following part of the allegory. You will find that those children who neglected for a time to consult their crosses, afterwards found it a very difficult task to tread in their shadow; for though we are told that the ways of wisdom are, in themselves, ways of pleasantness, and that all her paths are peace, the return to them is always by a hard way and rugged path.

A. Little Innocence found them peaceful and pleasant, because she always continued there.

Q. She did so for the short time she remained in the garden. You know what is meant by her fading away?

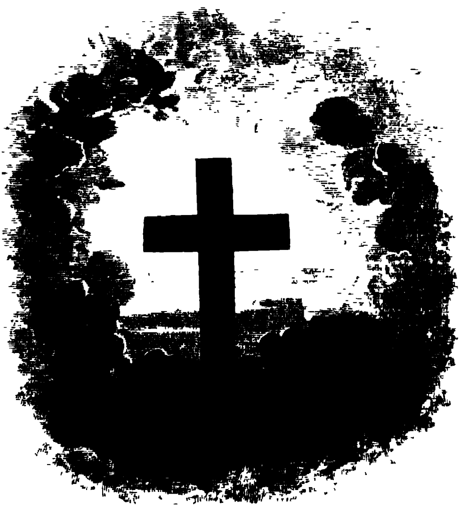
A. She was taken to heaven.

Q. And by the shadow that still seemed to fall from her cross?

A. The remembrance that she left upon the earth.

Q. Yes. There is an almost sacred feeling with which we regard everything connected with those little ones who

have lived and died in the Lord. The shadows of their cross may indeed be said to rest on each innocent amusement and occupation that they have lóved; and the images from other crosses will cluster around it, for no soil is more kindly to good and holy resolutions than the remembrance of departed friends: "to be with them is to be with Christ." There are affections and sympathies which are fixed upon them during their lives, which by their deaths it often pleases God to draw to Himself.





CHAPTER II.

When with dear friends sweet talk I hold,
And all the flowers of life unfold;
Let not my heart within me burn,
Except in all I Thee discern.

WHEN Innocence had thus early been called away from the garden, I selected one of the little group of mourners, whom I next resolved to watch. He was a very beautiful boy, and had been one of the favourite friends of Innocence, and when I first observed him, was crying bitterly for his loss. But he soon dried his tears, and as I looked on his clear and open forehead, the name of "Mirth" was written there. Long after he had ceased weeping, I could see that he had not forgotten his companion, for he continued to play in the same field in which Innocence had left him, and affection for his former playmate ever led him to choose those flowers on which the shadow of her cross was lingering still.

While he remained there, I knew that the boy was safe

from danger; but afterwards, when he began to wander to other parts of the garden, I grew alarmed lest some evil might befall him; for, though he grasped his own cross



firmly in his hand, so quick and lively was his step, that I feared he might soon be tempted to move beyond its shadow. However, I was beginning to hope there was no good reason for my alarm; for, though he gathered more abundantly than Innocence had done of the flowers that

were by the way, I observed that he never touched them until the shadow of his cross had rested upon them; and if there were any on which it did not fall, he passed them by. But before long, it seemed that his eye was attracted by a beautiful bed of roses and violets that grew on a little hill, at the foot of which he was walking: I saw him hold his cross for a moment between them and the sun, and he quite laughed for joy as he caught a glimpse of its shadow there; he bounded lightly forward, and, intending to gather a lovely nosegay, began in haste to scramble up the hill. Now, this I perceived with sorrow, for I was afraid the little fellow had not observed that there were many roses there on which no part of the shadow fell; and I feared lest in his eagerness he should seize one of them, and, by doing so, I knew not what risk he might incur. There was good cause for my fear. The child, breathless with his scramble up the hill, stretched out his hand and plucked the finest rose that he saw; it was one of those on which no shadow had fallen, and he had scarce held it a moment, when a wasp, that had concealed itself among the leaves, crawled out and stung him on the finger: the poor boy screamed with pain, for the sting of the wasp was unlike anything he had felt before. He hastily dashed the flower to the ground; but one leaf, I observed, was blown back by the wind and rested on his clothes: Mirth saw it also, and brushed it away; but, when it was gone, there was a stain on those garments which had been so white before. It was but a very little spot, and, as the tears trickled down upon it, grew so faint that it could hardly be discerned at

all; but still the spot was there. The smart, however, that the sting caused was of no long continuance, and in a short time little Mirth was going merrily on his way, as though no accident had happened.

By and by, as he was walking by a bright path across a field, one of his former companions perceived him, and ran over the green to meet him: I could see that he shook Mirth warmly by the hand, and persuaded him that for a little while they should amuse themselves together. But I was grieved that the friend of Innocence should join company with the child, for there was many a soil on his white garments, and there was no cross in his hand, and the name of "Wayward" was written on his brow. I thought, too, that Mirth looked shocked when first he met him, and I heard him ask after his cross; but Wayward laughed, and told him it was so troublesome to keep it always in his hand, that he now carried it in his clothes. He said, however, that he never forgot to take it out when there were any difficulties in the way; but in the green fields and smooth paths he needed not its shadow.

Now, methought, the stains on his clothes proved that, without the cross, neither the greenest fields nor the smoothest paths were safe; but it would seem that Mirth did not observe them, for his mind appeared at ease when he found Wayward had not thrown away the cross, and the two boys walked on together. Little Mirth still, however, kept his own cross in his hand, and its shadow ever fell clear and distinct on the bright path he trod; while Wayward walked heedlessly along the soft turf by his side, and

laughed at the caution of his companion. But I soon observed that Mirth was growing weary of the narrow way, and tired of placing his footsteps exactly in the print of the cross, and that by little and little he deviated from it; he ventured first close by the side of the grass, and then just to tread on its edge, and so he walked nearer to his companion. Now they had not gone far, when, at the point where the turf looked most soft and inviting, they fell into swampy ground, and in an instant the green miry water rose above their ankles. Poor Mirth, directly he felt it, leapt back upon the road, for it was at no great distance; but before he could reach it his garments were already splashed, and there was a sad shade of green all around their border. Wayward fell deeper into the marsh than Mirth, because he had been walking farther from the path; but, when he had forced his way out, he treated his misfortune lightly, and scarce stopped a moment to wipe the dirt from his clothes: nor did I wonder at this, for they were so stained before, that the splashes of the green mud could hardly be seen on them at all; but it made me feel the more pity for Mirth, as he looked sadly at his own stains; and I thought how foolish a thing it was, for a child still clad in raiment of white, to walk with one whose garments were so defiled.

It seemed, however, that Mirth thought not of that, for he still allowed Wayward to accompany him; nay, in a little while I almost fancied he began to look discontented at the whiteness of his clothes, for the fear of spoiling them often forced him to pick his way over stones with care, while his companion could walk heedlessly through the mud. Alas!

if it were so, the silly child had not much longer such cause for discontent; for a beautiful butterfly in a neighbouring field caught the attention of Wayward, and in a moment away he ran, calling to his companion to follow; and I saw that, for the first time, Mirth joined in the pursuit without consulting his cross. Now, I have no doubt the boys thought they would have to go but a very little way before they gained possession of their prize,—for I too fancied so at first; but, as they came near, the butterfly opened its bright wings to the sun, and fluttered away, settling first on one flower, then on another, and ever, as the children stretched out their hands to take it, just eluded their grasp. A long and wearisome chase it led them in the end. At first they went merrily through the green fields; but afterwards, as they grew more eager in the pursuit, and the bright butterfly tempted them on, they climbed steep hills, and scrambled down into the valleys beneath; they ran through brooks, leaped over ditches, and broke through hedges in their way, and yet the provoking insect was no nearer than before. And I said, "Oh that Mirth had tried whether the shadow of his cross would rest on its glittering wings, before he began thus hastily to follow it!" for many a splash of mud had fallen upon him in the eagerness of the pursuit, and his little hands were so scratched with thorns, that in some parts they had sprinkled his clothes with blood.

At length they came to a smooth grassy plain, at the border of which was a lovely grove of myrtles. The butterfly flew high in the air towards the distant trees, for



MIRTH AND WAYWARD IN PURSUIT OF THE BUTTERFLY.

there was neither plant nor flower in the plain itself. Now, I observed that Mirth had outstripped Wayward in the chase; and as he ran heedlessly on, gazing upwards towards the butterfly, his foot struck against a stone concealed in the long grass, and he was thrown violently to the ground. The careless child was well-nigh stunned by the fall; and when he recovered his feet, he trembled exceedingly, and the mark of the green grass was deeply imprinted on his clothes; yet I was glad that the accident made him grasp his little cross, which before he had well-nigh forgotten, the more firmly in his hand. Just as his companion joined him, he held it thoughtfully towards the sun; and when he saw that its image was not reflected on the wood, but on a hard, dull path, leading in an opposite direction, he at once turned aside from the beautiful butterfly which he had so long been following.

Wayward too seemed a little frightened by his companion's fall, for he also took out his cross; and when its dim shadow fell on the same hard, dull path, he too relinquished the pursuit of the butterfly, and accompanied Mirth. So the two boys walked on, sadly and silently, together; but Mirth limped a little as he went, from the pain of his fall. Very glad I was that they had not ventured to enter the wood; for, though they saw them not, I could see the bright eyes of a serpent gleaming from beneath the myrtle on which the butterfly was resting. He seemed to be waiting anxiously for the approach of the children, and I doubt not there was poison in his fang.

Now, I have said that the road by which Mirth and

Wayward left the grove of myrtles was dull and hard; for I had by this time discovered that, soft and beautiful as everything looked in the distance, there were not only some paths in the garden deceitful and dangerous, but others hard and dull. It led them by many a withered leaf and faded flower; and each leaf and flower was watered by the tears of Mirth, for his eyes were ever fixed downward upon the ground: he was as one who was unconscious whither he was walking, and whose only care was so to measure each step that it might fall exactly in the shadow before him. Wayward, too, for a little while, looked downward also, and step by step trod in the same path with his companion: but, when they had gone on for some time in safety, from the force of habit he left off carrying his cross in his hand, and concealed it as he had done before; and then he soon grew weary of the dulness of the road, and longed to turn aside to some of the pleasant paths on the right hand or on the left. He appeared to me, however, to be half afraid of wandering alone; for I heard him coaxing Mirth to leave off watching those gloomy images, and to come and join with him in some merry game, saying that, by doing so, he would the sooner forget the effects of his fall. But Mirth still walked on in the same disconsolate way, with his eyes fixed upon the ground. His heart was then indeed too full of heaviness to suffer him to think of play at all; yet, perhaps, he might not have been able to resist very long the entreaties of Wayward, had it not so happened that the boys did not much farther continue their walk together.

A sudden turn in the dull road brought them to one of those fields over which in happier times Mirth had often loved to ramble with Innocence; and the shadow of his cross rested full on a faded lily, which had been sown and watered by the hands of his former friend. Here the poor little fellow paused, and sobbed as though his very heart would break. I too felt very sorrowful; for my mind went back to the lovely scene when the two children had been playing together in the garden, and Mirth had been taught by Innocence to find pleasure in the cross. I remembered how happy they had both looked in their shining raiment of white, and how beautiful were the first holy images which fell on the objects around them; and, above all, I recollected the hour when the dove had settled so peacefully on the cross of her who was taken, while she was fading from my view: and then, as I gazed upon the one who had been left, and saw how his garments since then had been stained by many a dark and filthy spot, the bitter thought came upon me whether, if his friend still looked upon the garden, she would recognise him now, and whether, if Mirth were called away, he would be received in that better country to which Innocence was gone.

Such thoughts, also, seemed to force themselves on the mind of Mirth; for he knelt down by the lily to which the shadow had led him, and, as the tears chased each other down his cheeks, and fell on the stains, I could hear him murmur, "Oh, purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow!" Then I knew that he was speaking to the kind Father, who was ever

present among His children in the garden; and I remembered how the Voice had told me that there were means by which the sight and strength of the children might be renewed. Presently I saw him bend low and gaze earnestly on the faded flower; and while the big tear fell upon it, methought that his eye became less dim, and there was a gleam of hope and gladness on his face, as though he could again trace upon the leaves the light and lovely outline of the cross of Innocence. Then I also, in the midst of my sorrow, was glad; and I felt that Mirth was really happier as he wept over the lily of his friend, than he had been while, in the thoughtlessness of his heart, he was chasing the painted butterfly on the green. Moreover, as I watched him, I saw him kiss his little cross and press it to his heart; and I wondered not that he did so, for I knew it was that little cross, and that alone, which had freed him from all his perils; for, without it, he must have been bitten by the serpent in the myrtle grove; and had he not trod in its shadow along the hard dull road, he would not have been guided to the flower of Innocence at last.



CONVERSATION ON CHAPTER II.

Q. WHY was it that Mirth was safe while he remained where he had been playing with Innocence?

A. Because, as you have already said, when we think of companions and friends that are gone, our own hearts are drawn more closely to our Saviour.

Q. As soon as he left that field, what was the particular danger of Mirth?

A. He was too fond of pleasure.

Q. Yes; however anxious we may be to follow the cross, if we care too much for that which is pleasant, we shall be likely to err; for good and evil grow so close together in this world, that, unless we look quietly and carefully, we shall not always be able to distinguish between them. How is this shown in the allegory?

A. By the beautiful bed of flowers, from which Mirth, in his haste, gathered a rose on which the shadow did not fall.

Q. What is the sting of the wasp?

A. The pain caused by sin.

Q. What the mark of the rose-leaf?

A. The stain left by sin.

Q. When Mirth met Wayward, we are told that the cross of the latter was not in his hand: what is meant by this?

A. He was not trying to hold fast his Christian profession.

Q. Had he, then, altogether renounced the service of Christ?

A. No; for he still said he kept the cross, though he did not use it.

Q. Well, then, he thought that in trifling matters he might please himself, provided he abstained from great and notorious offences. He merely designed to use his cross now and then, and forgot that it was intended to guide him every moment that he continued in the garden. What had already been the sad consequence of this negligence?

A. He had really committed many sins, though he might consider them to be trival, or not sins at all; for there were spots and stains on all parts of his clothes.

Q. What was the effect of Mirth's joining him?

A. His clothes also soon lost their whiteness, for the two boys fell into a swamp together.

Q. What do we learn from this?

A. The danger of joining in the pursuits of those who talk lightly of religion, and do not profess in all things to be guided by the cross.

Q. What is afterwards signified by the discontent of Mirth, when he was not able to do as Wayward did?

A. Envy at the pleasures that the wicked seem to enjoy.

Q. Yes. And such envy is not only very sinful in itself, but also, if we indulge it, is sure to lead us to share in their unlawful pursuits. How is this shown in the allegory?

A. By the chase after the beautiful butterfly, in which Mirth united with Wayward without consulting his cross.

Q. How was it that this chase led the boys so much farther than they expected?

A. Because, when we begin to follow an unlawful pleasure, we cannot be aware of all the sin and sorrow through which it will lead us.

Q. Did the children get possession of the butterfly at last?

A. No, they gave it up in consequence of the stumble of Mirth.

Q. Why did that cause them to give it up?

A. It led Mirth to consult his cross, and then he saw that its shadow fell in an opposite direction.

Q. Yes. And often thus, by an unexpected stumble, it pleases God to check the sinner in his heedless course, and to awaken him to a sense of his danger. What is signified by the serpent concealed under the myrtle?

A. Satan was lying in wait to take advantage of their sin.

Q. What was the hard, dull path by which the children began to return?

A. The path of repentance.

Q. And the withered leaves and faded flowers are the recollection of opportunities neglected and blessings forfeited, which are always strewed along it. What is signified by the return to the field of Innocence?

A. Mirth was led to think of the happy days that in their childhood they had passed together, and of the quiet life, and, above all, of the tranquil and holy death of his former friend.

Q. How did these thoughts at first affect him?

A. He wept more bitterly than before.

Q. He did so, for there is nothing that causes the tears of repentance to flow more freely, than to go back in thought to days of peace and purity, and to reflect on the change that sin may have produced in our condition since those whom we once loved have been taken away. But did Mirth rest satisfied with tears alone?

A. No; for his sorrow led him to pray very earnestly to his Father.

Q. And the consequence of this was, that he soon felt happy, while he traced the mark of the cross on the faded flower of Innocence. And so it is written, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." To what did Mirth ascribe his present comfort, and his escape from danger?

A. He ascribed everything to the little cross he had been enabled to hold in his hand.

Q. And that is intended to remind us that we can do nothing of ourselves to help ourselves. It is the special grace of God that points out to the sinner the error of his way, and guides him along the path of repentance, and at length vouchsafes to him pardon and peace.

CHAPTER III.

> But if, indeed, with reckless faith
> We trust the flattering voice
> Which whispers, "Take thy fill ere death,
> Indulge thee and rejoice:"
>
> Too surely, every setting day,
> Some lost delight we mourn;
> The flowers all die along our way,
> Till we, too, die forlorn.

THE tears were fast rising in my eyes as I turned them away from the kneeling child, so affecting was the scene; but for the present I watched him no more, for about him my mind was now at rest; but I felt fearfully anxious to trace the course of his companion who neglected the cross. Wayward had not seen the shadow resting on the flower, but had walked carelessly through the field; otherwise his thoughts also might have gone back to the time when he played with Innocence, and he would perhaps have wept together with his companion. He had advanced some distance before he observed that Mirth had ceased to accompany him; but as soon as he perceived it he was alarmed to find himself alone; for, though he cared but

little for the cross himself, he had felt some sort of safety from being near to one who trod within its shadow. He first looked anxiously around, and then in a hurried manner began to retrace his steps. I had no doubt that his intention was to rejoin his companion; but, short as was the distance back, in his haste he managed to lose the way, and got into a path that led him farther and farther from the field in which Mirth was kneeling. I could plainly hear his companion's voice calling to him to return, and I saw that Wayward heard it also, for he continually paused and listened, as though he wished to ascertain the direction of the distant sound. And then the unhappy boy would shout loudly in reply, and turning to the right hand or the left, begin to hurry along some new track; but, each time that he started again, he made some fresh error in the way, and as I watched him I knew that it would be so, for his cross was not in his hand.

In a little time he had got quite to a different part of the garden from that in which he had parted with Mirth. He saw there a pretty group of children, whom he was very anxious to join; but they were frightened when they observed that he had no cross, and one of them cried out that his dirty hands would soil the whiteness of their garments; so they refused to let him take part in their play. He tried one or two other groups, but some hurried away as he approached, and others shrank back from his touch, until at last he found a party of boys who had no crosses, and whose clothes were more filthy than his own. These boys welcomed him gladly, and he began to leap and



WAYWARD SHUNNED BY THE CHILDREN.

run with them. They all laughed loudly and tried to be merry; but no shadow fell on the ground which they trod, and they soon grew weary of laughter itself. So their game terminated in a quarrel, and that brought on blows, which added fresh stains to the clothes of these unhappy children. Even Wayward grew shocked at the scene which he now witnessed, and, hastening away from his companions, again began to ramble through the garden alone.

He now seemed to be wandering to and fro without any object, as a child that was blind; but I saw that he plenteously gathered of the flowers, and ate of the fruits that he found; and as he did so his garments became more and more discoloured, and his countenance pale and sickly, and his manner full of restlessness and languor, so that I was very greatly alarmed, for I could not but remember how the Voice had said that there was poison in the garden. I saw, too, that Wayward had become not only sickly, but wretched also; he no longer could derive enjoyment from anything he tasted or touched, but was suspicious of them all. Sometimes I thought he looked anxiously about him for the shadow of the cross; and yet, whether it were from indolence, or from the force of habit, or from some fatal delusion, I cannot tell, but the cross itself he did not hold.

At length in his wanderings he came to a long high wall, on the Western side of which there was a tree loaded with nectarines, riper and more beautiful than any he had before seen. Now, at first he seemed as though he were going to turn away, for though he held not his cross, he knew at

once that the bright sun shining in the East could shed no image there; and yet he lingered and looked wistfully at the fruit; and as he looked, he perceived one gathering from the tree, whose garments were yet white, and whose cross was in her hand. I also looked at her that gathered the fruit, and I could read the name of "Selfdeceit" imprinted upon her brow; and I saw there was something foul and horrible even in the very whiteness of her garments, and that wan and ghastly were the images that fell from her cross. Now, I began to wonder how those images were formed, and behold! there gleamed in the air behind her a dark blue flame; then I discovered that there were false meteor lights in the Garden of the Shadow of the Cross: doubtless they were placed there by the enemy of the King, in order to tempt the children to taste the poisonous fruits; but I shuddered exceedingly when I saw that the cross might thus be converted into an instrument of destruction; yet so unlike were the false images to those formed by the clear and brilliant sun in the East, that they could deceive none but the eye that had been long a stranger to the real image, and the heart that was anxious to believe them true. Even Wayward, as he drew nigh, trembled, and felt there was something unnatural in the shadows that fell on the Western wall; but when Selfdeceit offered him one of the ripest nectarines, and pointed triumphantly to the pale outline that might be traced upon it, he was tempted, and he took it and did eat. While he was eating, some of the juice oozed out from the fruit (for it was very ripe) and fell upon his clothes: it marked them

with a stain which, though they were already much discoloured, was of a deeper crimson than any I had seen before. Wayward threw down the remainder of the nectarine and was hastening away, but Selfdeceit called to him to stop, and said that she could very easily remove the stain. So Wayward stopped, and Selfdeceit took a substance which seemed to me like chalk, and rubbed it over the spot on which the juice had fallen, and not that spot only, but over the whole of the garments of her companion, until she had produced upon them the same foul and horrible whiteness that I had remarked upon her own. When it was done, I thought that Wayward tried to smile, as though he again were clean; but the smile passed away in a sigh, for in his inmost heart he knew that the stains were hidden, but not removed, and that the all-seeing eye of his Father could perceive them still.

Yet he did not fly from Selfdeceit as he ought to have done, but still continued in her company, eating the fruits on which the false images fell, and allowing the treacherous chalk to be rubbed upon his clothes. The children did not walk very long together, but during that time the appearance of Wayward became so altered, that before they parted I doubt whether Mirth could have recognised him again; the form emaciated by disease, the feverish and uncertain step, the hectic flush on his sallow cheek, and the wildness in his bloodshot eye, had left but little of the gay, though careless, child who had run so lightly after the butterfly on the green. Yet, great as was the change in his appearance owing to the poison on which he lived, the change that had

taken place in his dress was greater still; for his garments were more disguised by the strange whiteness caused by the chalk, than they could have been by the darkest stain. He was, however, fast becoming accustomed to its use, for it was astonishing how many accidents befell Wayward and Selfdeceit as they moved along;—sometimes they slipped, and rolled into the mire; sometimes they were tripped up, and fell on the swampy grass; sometimes they stained themselves with fruit; sometimes noxious reptiles would crawl over their clothes; and sometimes foul spots, as in a leprosy, would suddenly break out upon them, without any cause which they could discern: and on each of these occasions, Selfdeceit would take out her chalk, and apply it to her companion's garments and her own.

In this wretched way they kept walking side by side, until they came to the borders of a great wood, and there Selfdeceit bade her companion go first, saying that she would follow; but Wayward drew back, and refused to advance farther before he had first consulted his cross. I do not know why at that particular moment he should have paused; it may be that it merely proceeded from his usual dislike to go first; or it may be he was frightened by a deep and angry sound, even as the roaring of a lion, which issued from the wood, and yet his ears had now grown so dull, that I cannot tell whether he heard it at all; and I think it most likely that he only delayed, because the scene brought back to his memory the hour in which he had stood with Mirth at the entrance of the myrtle-grove, when the holy image had warned them both to turn aside. But be

the cause what it may, he stood still, and drew his long-neglected cross from his bosom.

It was, indeed, a scene that caused my heart to beat high with interest. Wayward was standing a little in advance of Selfdeceit, and one step more would have brought him within the borders of the wood; and, as he raised his cross with a trembling hand, I could see a smile of mockery pass over the countenance of his companion. In a moment the meteor lights were flickering in the air around them, and a crowd of confused and ghastly shadows fell at the feet of the bewildered boy. He had suffered his eyes to become so very dim, that it was in vain he now endeavoured to distinguish the true image from the false: but I observed that from that very uncertainty he hesitated whether to advance; and I believe at last he would have turned aside, had not Selfdeceit with her own hand lighted a torch behind him, which threw one long deep shadow in the direction of the forest. Then Wayward ventured to move forward; but scarce had he made the first step, when there was a laugh as of fiends in the air, and behold! the earth opened beneath the feet of Selfdeceit, and she and her flaming torch and her whited garments were swallowed up, and I saw them no more. Together with the light which had caused it, the long deep shadow also passed away, and Wayward once more looked round him in doubt; he then saw the fate of his companion, and uttered a shrill and piercing cry, and, in his alarm dropping the cross out of his hand, he ran hastily from the wood. But now, alas! it was too late for flight; the lion, that had lain in wait for him there, had

already made his fatal spring: he seized on his prey and pulled him down upon the ground, and in a moment was griping with his savage teeth, and tearing to pieces with his claws, the companion of Selfdeceit.



CONVERSATION ON CHAPTER III.

Q. How was it that Wayward did not continue in the same field with Mirth?

A. Because he no longer watched the shadow of the cross.

Q. That is to say, though he appeared to be following the same course with his companion, he did not, in truth, resemble him; for he made no real effort to regulate each thought, word, and deed, by the rule of his Christian profession. But when he first missed him, did he endeavour to join him again?

A. He was very anxious to do so, and yet could not resolve to consult his cross.

Q. Yes; and so he afterwards wished to play with those children whose garments were still white. Now, what does this signify?

A. That sinners who are not yet hardened feel a sort of security in seeming to follow the same occupations with good men.

Q. Did Wayward succeed in this wish?

A. No. On the contrary, he began to play with the boys who had no crosses, and garments more filthy than his own.

Q. And what does that signify?

A. Careless Christians are often forced into the company of those who have advanced farther along the paths of destruction than themselves.

Q. What were the fruits and flowers which afterwards so discoloured the garments of Wayward, and rendered him sickly and pale?

A. They were the idle pursuits and pleasures in which in mere thoughtlessness he indulged.

Q. What is signified by his longing for the nectarine on the western wall?

A. A desire which he could not help knowing was sinful, but which he still sought some excuse to gratify.

Q. And did he find any such excuse?

A. Yes; it was afforded him by the false lights that were in the garden, and the cross that was held by Selfdeceit.

Q. Who was it that placed the false lights in the garden?

A. Satan, the enemy of the King, who is able to transform himself into an angel of light.

Q. What was the state of Selfdeceit?

A. She had become so very bad, that she could no longer distinguish between good and evil.

Q. Yes; it was that state which is called judicial blindness. And remember that we all are liable to be brought into it by resisting the Holy Spirit of God. If we persist in desiring what we know to be wrong, we shall soon endeavour to think it right, and then Satan will half convince us that it is so, and our understanding will be gradually darkened, and we shall become hardened and impenitent; then the cross

of Christ will become to us of no effect. Such you may remember was the condition of the Jewish people, when the day of their visitation was passed, and they thought they were doing an action well-pleasing to God in crucifying their Saviour. Did Wayward fall into that miserable state?

A. Not entirely; for, though he yielded to the persuasion of Selfdeceit, his heart was always full of sorrow and fear.

Q. What was that crimson stain which the juice of the nectarine left upon his clothes?

A. That deep and fearful mark which is produced by a wilful and deliberate act of sin.

Q. What is signified by the chalk that Selfdeceit persuaded him to employ?

A. He endeavoured to hide from himself and from others the consequence of his sin.

Q. Yes. He assumed that white covering which makes all outwardly appear well, while there is nothing but rottenness within. Such we know to have been the state of the Scribes and Pharisees in the time of our Saviour.

A. I remember that He Himself declares they were but "whited sepulchres."

Q. What do we learn from the numerous spots and stains that afterwards broke out on Wayward and Selfdeceit?

A. That our sins will increase upon us in proportion as we endeavour to keep them out of sight.

Q. What is signified by the edge of the forest at which Wayward again consulted his cross?

A. It was one of those important occasions on which he did endeavour to act rightly.

Q. How then was it that he consulted it in vain?

A. Because he had so long neglected it; and been contented with watching the false shadows.

Q. He experienced that doubt and perplexity which is the consequence of sin unrepented of. And was the dimness of his sight in any way to be attributed to himself?

A. Yes; it must have been entirely owing to his own neglect; for we are told that the sight of those children would never grow dim who used the means that their Father appointed for preserving it.

Q. What is signified by Selfdeceit holding a false light behind him?

A. She endeavoured by wicked and lying arguments to overcome the fearfulness of Wayward, and lead him to continue in his sinful course.

Q. And, by doing so, she acted the part of the first tempter of mankind. The earth opening and swallowing her up, is designed to represent the fearful judgment which even in this life sometimes overtakes the sinner. What effect had this judgment upon her companion?

A. He ran hastily away, but as he did so he dropped his cross, and was seized by the lion out of the forest.

Q. Who is signified by the lion?

A. "Our adversary the devil, who goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."

Q. And what is meant by dropping the cross?

A. Abandoning the faith of Christ.

Q. The sudden consciousness of his danger will often cause the sinner to fall away altogether from the faith, and

as it were to give himself over to the power of Satan. Such would appear to have been the case of Judas Iscariot, when he went out and hanged himself, after he had betrayed his Lord: instead of that repentance which would have led him onward to hope, he felt only the agony of that remorse which brought him into the depth of despair. Remember, then, that it is possible to be aroused too late to a sense of the fearful consequences of sin.





CHAPTER IV.

> Refresh us, Lord, to hold it fast;
> And when Thy veil is drawn at last,
> Let us depart where shadows cease,
> With words of blessing and of peace.

I HAD already begun to mourn for Wayward, as for one who was lost; for even had he been in health and vigour, his strength would have been but weakness against the ferocious animal that was devouring him now; but sickly and powerless as he had been rendered by disease, save by his fearful shrieks he could offer no resistance at all. His cries for help were becoming fainter and fainter, when behold! there came forth from the forest a fair and gentle girl; her garments were almost of a spotless white, and yet methought she seemed as though she had been long in the garden, and the name of "Charity" was written on her brow. And I wondered at first how she could have wandered through that gloomy forest alone, and I was alarmed lest the lion that was tearing Wayward might turn his fury upon her; but I soon found there was cause neither for wonder nor alarm, for her cross was in her hand. The shadow fell full

on the forehead of the savage beast, and with a low sullen growl he forsook his prey, and crouched in servile fear before the little child. His eyes glared horribly as he turned back, and he kept moving his head to and fro, as though he fain would have shaken off the holy image; but his struggles to resist its influence were all in vain, and step by step he was forced to shrink away, and hide himself in the darkness of the forest. Then did Charity draw nigh to the faint and bleeding boy, and bandage his mangled limbs, and stanch the blood that was gushing copiously from the wounds; and, as she did so, the purple stream that flowed upon her garments of white left no stain upon them, but only made them brighter than before.

Wayward had had a very narrow escape from destruction, and it was a long time before he so far came to himself as to be able to stand up. I cannot tell what fearful dreams he may have had while he was lying prostrate on the ground; but the moment that he arose, his first thought was of his cross: he felt for it in his bosom, but he found that it was not there; and I shall not easily forget the look of anguish and despair that was on his face when he remembered he had let it fall. He threw himself down on the ground, and searched very anxiously for the treasure he had neglected so long; but his head swam and his sight was dizzy, and he looked for it in vain. Nay, it had fallen so near the forest, and the grass was so long, and the bushes so numerous, that there was little hope of his recovering it again; and yet he now felt that, if he found it not, he himself was lost. He told Charity of his sad loss, and with tears and groans be-

sought her earnestly to assist him in the search. So Charity raised her own cross on high, and the dark outline fell on a thick bush of furze close by the outskirts of the wood; it was there that the cross of Wayward had fallen, and she bade the boy call earnestly on his gracious Father, and advance with a good courage, telling him that, though others might point out where it was, no hand but his own could take it up. Wayward did advance, but it was with fear and trembling: he often raised his eyes timidly towards the forest, as though he was afraid lest the lion might seize upon him again: when, too, he stood by the bush, and stretched out his hand, it was sad to see how the noxious insects stung him, and the thorns entered into the new-made wounds; twice in anguish did he draw it back; the second time that he did so, a low growl was heard issuing from the wood, and then in haste he thrust his hand down again, regardless of the pain, and seizing on his lost treasure hurried back to the side of Charity.

Now I rejoiced greatly that Wayward had recovered his cross; I was glad, too, that the chalk with which Selfdeceit had bedaubed his clothes was gone, for the red streams of blood had washed it away. Yet still was I very sorrowful when I saw how fearfully they were now defiled: it seemed that whole rivers of tears would be unable to restore to them any portion of their original whiteness, and I could not but doubt whether poor Wayward might hereafter be recognised as the King's child. The same thoughts, too, were weighing him down, for he groaned deeply and was very sorrowful; and then I heard Charity speaking to him



WAYWARD RECOVERING HIS CROSS.

of the tender mercies of their King and Father, and telling him that, if only he was able to hold steadfastly for the time to come by the cross, and walk carefully in its shadow, he need in no wise despair; for, though his own tears could not cleanse his garments, there was One who might wash them for him with the water of life; so that, though they were now as scarlet, they would become as white as snow; though they were red like crimson, they should be as wool.

When he heard this, Wayward looked down upon his cross, but there still was very much of sadness in his gaze; he felt in truth that his hand was too feeble to hold it steadfastly for the time to come, and his eye too dim to discern its shadow. But Charity again addressed him with words of comfort; she reminded him that they were not alone in the garden, and that there were means by which, if only he would be diligent in employing them, his strength and his sight would gradually be renewed; "The same kind Father," she said, "Who has given you the will and the power to recover your cross, can render it once more the guardian of your steps."

Then did he take comfort, and while he feebly raised his cross, methought that he earnestly besought his Father to restore to him a portion of his former strength.

For some little while Charity walked by his side, and gently holding him by the hand, guided him safely through the snares and stumblingblocks that beset them on their way. But before long the warning shadows bade them proceed along different paths, that of Charity leading her through a smooth verdant meadow, that of Wayward falling

on a rough uneven ground, close to the border of the wood. So, with many a parting warning, and ever, as she went, holding on high the sacred sign, Charity bade adieu to Wayward, and I cannot tell that she ever beheld him again. For a moment I watched her light graceful form as she passed through the pleasant fields: it was, indeed, a lovely sight; the long grass and the flowers appeared to bend as she approached, lest they might stain the hem of her white garments: the little lambs would come to lick the hand which held the cross, and the birds sang more tunefully as its shadow fell upon them.

But I turned from this pleasing picture, for I was anxious to know what would become of Wayward now he was once more alone; he too had been watching the retreating form of Charity, and the tear rose in his eye as he felt it was not for him to accompany her along the ways of pleasantness and peace. He began his solitary journey, and I could see that he was struggling hard to hold firmly by the cross, and was inwardly resolving to follow the advice of Charity. But, alas! that which might have been sweet and easy once had become a task of much labour and difficulty now: for though his Father did not suffer his strength or sight altogether to fail, he was allowed continually to feel the ill effects of his former wanderings. His arm grew faint and weary when he lifted it on high; and his cross itself would at one time glow with a burning heat, and raise blisters on his hand; and at another, would become cold as a mass of ice, until his numbed fingers could scarce retain it in their grasp. Its shadow, too, no longer fell on fruits or on

flowers, nor on anything desirable to the eye, but on husks and withered leaves, and all the refuse of the earth. I saw, also, that he staggered to and fro as he walked along, and that, from his very anxiety to place his footsteps right, he often stumbled and well-nigh fell, and, by the continued difficulties of the path, he was brought into so great trouble and misery, that he went mourning all the day long. How strange must he now have thought it, that there had been a time when he fancied that he could walk safely without the aid of his cross! and how often must he have wished that it would again afford him that clear and distinct shadow which it was wont to shed when first he entered the garden! For even this comfort was denied him now. The meteor lights which he had allowed to accompany him in his wanderings with Selfdeceit still continued to hover around him, and kept throwing their deceitful shadows on secret poisons and hidden snares: many a time did he pause long and anxiously, before he could distinguish between the true image and the false, and often had he reason to rejoice that the real shadow was dark and gloomy, because he could the more easily discern it. He knew also that he had good reason to be alarmed, for the roar of the lion that had torn him once was ever sounding in his ears; and each time that he hesitated, he fancied he could perceive his fierce eyes glaring upon him from the wood: it seemed as though the beast, having once marked him for his own, was watching every step that he took, and ready in a moment to pounce upon his prey. At length the shadow fell upon a pathway leading directly into the wood; Wayward gazed

doubtfully upon it a little while, but, when he saw that it was the true image, with slow and trembling steps he continued to follow it. I soon lost sight of him among the trees, so that I cannot tell what may have befallen him there; but I have a good hope that he walked in safety through all its dangers, for, though his garments were stained with blood, and his limbs were faint, and his eyes dim, and though the beasts of the forest were howling around him, his cross was in his hand.

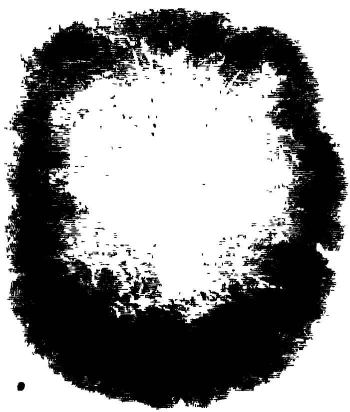
Still I was not sorry that I could no longer watch him, for it had become very painful to me to trace his steps; not only was there trouble in each path that he trod, but there was even much to render me sad in the gloomy shadows that fell from his cross; so I suffered my eye to wander towards the more lovely parts of the garden, in hope that once again it might rest upon Mirth. I soon discovered him not far from the field in which Wayward had left him; he had altered very little since then, except that the cheerfulness of his countenance and the buoyancy of his step had returned. He was holding his cross towards the sun, and his face beamed bright with gratitude as he traced its outline on the flowers strewed in his path. The shadows were not, indeed, so light and lovely as those which had fallen from the cross of Innocence, yet still they were very beautiful,—more beautiful than the fairest flowers on which they fell. The garments of Mirth had almost recovered their whiteness, yet they, too, were not so bright and shining as those of Innocence had been; nay, I fancied I could yet trace upon them the dim outline of each former stain, not

only the deeper marks that had been caused by his careless chase with Wayward, but even the first little spot that the falling rose-leaf had left. The marks were so very faint, that while the shadow of the cross rested upon them they could not be discerned; but, when they were exposed to the clear and brilliant light of the sun, I could see that they still were there. "Surely, then," I said within myself, "the children whose garments are yet unsullied, would run less heedlessly if they knew that their early stains would continue with them so long!" Mirth was happy now, but he would have been far happier if he had never left the shadow of his cross; for there was often a momentary expression of sadness on his face, when some gay butterfly with its golden wings fluttered across his path, and brought to his remembrance his former wanderings. Yet were his garments so white, that it was easy to recognise him for the King's child; and I knew that his kind Father would cleanse them at last from every spot, and I almost longed for the time when the white dove might settle on his cross, and Mirth should be called away from the garden.

Then did my thoughts wander to the land to which Innocence was gone, and I said in my heart, How glorious must that land be in which this same bright sun is shining, while all the children are clad in raiment of a dazzling whiteness! It must be that the cross, which is their safeguard here, will there be their delight; they will love for ever to watch the holy shadows; and yet will they then require them no more, for in that better land there will be neither danger in the fields, nor poison in the flowers.

And the still soft Voice replied: "In that better land there will be neither fields nor flowers such as you now behold; for the grass withereth, and the flower fadeth, but there will be nothing there that can either wither or fade. In that better land the cross will indeed be the delight of the children, and the bright sun will be reflected on their garments of dazzling whiteness; but, when raised on high, the cross will cast no shadow there; it will itself shine with exceeding lustre, the rays of immortality will be shed from it, and all things will be filled with light and gladness by its pure and living fire."

Now, while I wondered at this, and tried to picture to myself a land lovely without fields or flowers, and in which the cross might be raised towards the sun and yet no shadow be discerned, behold! the vision of the fair garden passed away, and I saw no more.



CONVERSATION ON CHAPTER IV.

Q. How was Wayward released from his perilous condition?

A. Charity came with her white garments from the wood, and drove away the beast that was devouring him.

Q. Did she do so by her own strength?

A. No; but by the shadow which fell from the cross which she was enabled to hold in her hand.

Q. We learn, then, from this, that, though man may be made the instrument of rescuing the sinner from the power of Satan, it is only by means of the Cross of Christ that he is able to do so. What is signified by Charity binding the mangled limbs, and stanching the blood?

A. Praying for the sinner, and offering him the hope of pardon by the comforting promises of the gospel.

Q. What effect upon the garments of Charity had the purple stream that flowed from the wounds of Wayward?

A. It only rendered them brighter than before.

Q. Yes; for if we seek the company of sinners, with a sincere desire to lead them into the ways of life, our minds

will not be polluted by their wickedness, but our very efforts to save them will, by the grace of God, be a means of keeping ourselves unspotted from the world. How is this declared in the conclusion of the Epistle of St. James?

A. "He which converteth a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."

Q. And it is probably with a similar allusion that St. Peter tells us, "that charity shall cover the multitude of sins." What is signified by Wayward seeking in vain for the cross he had dropped?

A. He knew not how to turn himself towards God, until Charity pointed out to him the way.

Q. But why is it said that no hand but his own could take up the cross?

A. Because other men cannot repent for us. They can only show us what we are to do, but we must act for ourselves.

Q. Yes; the sinner will always find he must take up his own cross to follow Christ; none can bear it for him. But what is signified by the thorns and noxious insects that caused him twice to draw back his hand?

A. They are the bitter pains of remorse, the doubtfulness and the other thoughts of anguish, which attend our first struggle to set ourselves free from long-continued sin.

Q. What is meant by his recovery of the cross?

A. He was led by the grace of God to turn for mercy to the Cross of Christ, and once more to rest his hopes on the privileges he had received in Baptism.

Q. And did this at once remove all his fearfulness and alarm?

A. No; for we are told that he groaned very deeply when he saw how his white garments had been defiled.

Q. How did Charity afford him comfort?

A. She reminded him that there was One Who was both able and willing to cleanse them for him.

Q. To whom does this refer?

A. To the Lord Jesus Christ, Who will wash away the stain of sin from those who believe in Him, by the Precious Blood that He shed upon the Cross.

Q. But was the fearfulness of Wayward caused by the past alone?

A. He feared for the future also; for he became more and more conscious of the infirmity and blindness that had been caused by his long neglect.

Q. How did Charity again afford him comfort?

A. She reminded him of the continual presence of their Father, and the means that He had appointed for the renewal of their strength and sight.

Q. Yes; and we may consider Wayward as employing those means, when he sorrowed for the past, and besought his Father to restore to him a portion of his former strength. Why is he represented as not continuing long with Charity?

A. Because the returning sinner, even though his penitence be sincere, must not expect to tread the same pleasant paths with those who from their youth up have been mindful of their God.

Q. What is signified by the grass and the flowers bending at the approach of Charity?

A. Wherever she went she was attended by purity and peace.

Q. Yes. It again reminds us that her occupation was the conversion of sinners. It was this that rendered her garments bright, for it is written, "They that turn many to righteousness, shall shine as the stars for ever and ever." What is signified by the weariness of the arm of Wayward, and his staggering on the way?

A. That, even after a sinner has begun a course of repentance, he will find great difficulty in continuing therein.

Q. Where have we this difficulty most fully described?

A. In the penitential Psalms of David, who says of himself, that "he was brought into so great trouble and misery, that he went mourning all the day long."

Q. What do you understand by the burning heat and the icy coldness of the cross that Wayward held?

A. Even while he tries to hold fast his faith in Christ, the mind of the penitent is sometimes too much elated by presumptuous hopes, and sometimes too much cast down by despair.

Q. What were the false lights?

A. The delusions that in some sort still continued, as a consequence of his former sin.

Q. Why is he said to have rejoiced in the gloominess of the shadows?

A. Because the sincere penitent can often see most

clearly the path of duty by means of the sacrifices it requires of him.

Q. What was the roar of the lion that he always continued to hear?

A. He felt that Satan, into whose power he had once fallen, would ever be upon the watch to seize upon him again.

Q. Yes. And in the same way our Saviour warns us that the evil spirit, when it is gone out of a man, will return again with seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and endeavour to gain possession of its former home. Did Wayward finally escape his snares?

A. It is left in uncertainty.

Q. It is so. When we lose sight of him he is doing well; and we trust that God may be pleased to accomplish the good work that He has begun in him: but our hope can never be unmingled with alarm. New trials and new dangers ever keep springing up under his feet, as a consequence of his former wanderings; and each step that he advances, we are fearful lest he may fall. Let us now return to Mirth: what do we learn from the contrast his condition affords?

A. The comparatively peaceful end of those, who, though they may have lived carelessly a little while, still in the days of their youth come back to the ways of virtue, and endeavour afterwards, by God's grace, to continue therein.

Q. But does it not also warn us of the danger of the faults of childhood and the follies of youth, by showing us

that our after years will in some sort bear upon them the mark of each early wandering?

A. Yes; for the stain even of the rose-leaf might be seen on the white garments of Mirth, and there was sadness on his countenance when a butterfly with its golden wings flew across his path.

Q. How then is that stain and how is that sorrow to be removed?

A. If we hold fast the cross, the Blood of the Lord Jesus will cleanse us from all sin, and wipe away all tears from our faces hereafter.

Q. Why is it that in the garden the cross is always spoken of as casting a shadow?

A. Because religion seems to take away their brightness from the various objects that we desire in this world.

Q. Yes. Our Christian profession may truly be represented as throwing a continual shadow on our present existence. The Cross of Christ has not greatly changed the pleasures and occupations of mankind, but it gives them all a complexion of its own; and, thus, while in truth it renders them better and more lovely than before, it robs them of the false colouring with which Satan is wont to invest them: for they have no longer that glare and brilliancy which proves so attractive to the eye of man. In another and happier world, the false colouring will no longer exist, the cross itself will be all in all, and therefore it will cast no shadow there. In another and happier world those little children who have held their crosses to the end, and followed faithfully the shadows of them, whether they have been for very

many years or only for a few hours in the garden, whether they have trodden the hard way of repentance, or the peaceful and pleasant paths, whether the images that have guided them have been gloomy and dull, or soft and beautiful, will all once more be united together, and enjoy perpetual rest and felicity in the presence of their Saviour.



MIRTH ON THE DANGEROUS PATH (SEE P. 29).

THE DISTANT HILLS.

*"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.
My help cometh from the Lord, Which made heaven and earth."*

PSALM cxxi 1, 2.



MINNA RESTING IN THE EVENING

CHAPTER I.

> Abide with me from morn till eve,
> For without Thee I cannot live:
> Abide with me when night is nigh,
> For without Thee I dare not die.

It was a dreary night, and the wind moaned among the trees of a vast and gloomy forest; dark wintry clouds were flitting across the sky; the moon and the stars gleamed forth at intervals, but their partial light was intercepted by the thick branches of the wood. Two poor orphans had been benighted there, and could find no track to lead them through its gloom. They felt that it was in vain for them to wander to and fro without some friendly hand to guide their steps; yet they were afraid to call out for assistance, lest the wild beasts that howled around might be attracted by their cries; and at length, cold, faint, and weary, they sank down side by side on the damp earth, and gave themselves over for lost.

Now, while they were in this miserable condition, they were startled by hearing the footsteps of one who trod softly among the leaves of the forest; the roar of the lion, the

hissing of the serpent, and all other evil sounds, were hushed as it drew near; and presently the silence was broken by a gentle voice, which asked the children whether they would be glad to leave that dangerous wood, and to be taken to a bright, cheerful, and happy home. The poor orphans scarcely understood the meaning of the words; they made an effort to arise; but their limbs were too feeble to support them: they tried to speak, but their voices also failed; so they could only look up to the stranger with tearful eyes, as though they fain would have besought him to have pity upon them, and carry them away from that terrible place.

Then the stranger took the little girls in his arms, and with a quick, unerring step walked straight on, until he had brought them to a river at the boundary of the forest. Here he paused for a moment, and bathed the children in the refreshing water. He then crossed over to a gentle eminence beyond, and suffered them to rest on the soft grass. Now, such was the virtue of that river in which the two sisters had been bathed, that it not only had washed away from their garments the stains that had clung to them in the wood, but it had also removed the stiffness and weariness of their limbs, and given them, as it were, new life. The night, too, had passed away, and a fresh morning now dawned upon them; and as the early sun shone brightly, they felt cheerful and happy, and began, with grateful hearts, to thank the kind stranger for their deliverance. He looked down, and putting one hand on the head of each, smiled graciously upon them, and told them

that they were now among the number of his Father's adopted children, and that their names were Rhoda and



Minna; he promised also that if they would be content to love and obey him, he had yet greater kindness in store for them than that which they had received.

While the children wondered at these words, he raised his finger, and, pointing to the east, asked them what they saw. Rhoda and Minna looked up and gazed in silence, for they were unable to describe the grandeur of the scene. It seemed as though there were a vast ocean of hills and mountains, rising majestically one above the other; the sides of them were covered with the brightest flowers and greenest verdure, but the top of them they were unable to see, for a bright and fleecy cloud was resting upon it.

And the stranger said, "Among those glorious mountains my Father has his dwelling-place, and you, from this hour, must learn to look upon them as your home. Thousands and thousands of happy children are living there; they already regard you as members of the same family as themselves, and at this moment, in their morning song, are rejoicing at your deliverance from the dangers of the forest. Listen, and you will hear their voices." Then there arose a soft and gentle breeze; it was fragrant with the flowers that grew upon the mountains, and strains of heavenly music came floating upon it.

Rhoda and Minna listened in rapture to the sound, and they wondered whether their kind deliverer would bear them at once to those distant hills, and allow them to unite their voices in the song of joy. But he answered their thoughts, and said, "Not yet, my children; I cannot yet suffer you to dwell with the rest of my family in their happy home; you must be content for a little while to think of it, to watch it, to wish for it, and to love it. For one day and one night I shall leave you on the spot where you now are.



THE STRANGER POINTS OUT THE DISTANT HILLS.

Here you will have a period of light, and a period of darkness; during the former you must be watchful, during the latter you must rest; but the length of each of them is uncertain. I shall not tell you how many the hours of light, and how many those of darkness will be. It may be that you will be allowed the gradual succession of morning, noon, and evening; and will experience also the changes of sunshine and of storm; or it may be that the sun which now shines upon you will sink in a moment, while yet it seems to be in the east, and the night will suddenly arrive. But whatever be the length of the day, the service that I require of you is the same; you are to keep raising your eyes to those beautiful hills in the distance; to take delight in the mountain breeze, and to listen with joy and thankfulness to the soft strains of music that you hear. So will your hearts and voices be in harmony with the rest of my Father's children, when the hour comes at which I shall return to take you to the land where they dwell. I do not, indeed, forbid you to enjoy the beauties of the spot on which you will be left; you may employ yourselves in cultivating the ground, and endeavour, as far as you are able, to increase its loveliness; you may also, if you wish it, play together upon the grass and gather freely of the flowers that are around you; but do not suffer your affections to be fixed upon them, or regard them as your own; they cannot afford you lasting pleasure, for they will soon themselves wither and die; the garden in which they grow is only for a little while your resting-place; the distant hills are your home. Of all the objects that you now see, those

hills alone are eternal, and will never disappoint your love: if any trouble or affliction befall you, it is to them that you must lift up your eyes, for upon them are herbs that can assuage every care and sorrow, and trees and flowers that never fade. This, then, is the easy service that I require of you during the present day. Do not forget that at any moment it may close, and that, sooner or later, a long night will succeed it. You will then feel your eyes grow heavy, and a deep sleep, that you cannot resist, will fall upon you; but if you have remained within view of the eastern mountains, you may lie down to rest without fear, for no evil shall befall you during the long hours of the night. On the morrow the shrill blast of a trumpet will arouse you from your repose, and I will then return with the children to whose voices you have been listening, and carry you away to the beautiful hills. There you will live with me for ever! for to that happy land there is no morning, noon, or evening, but the joy and unchanging brightness of an everlasting day."

The stranger paused a little while, that the hearts of the sisters might indulge in those glad and grateful feelings which his promise had called forth; he then directed their attention to a long ruinous wall, situated between the eminence on which they stood and the beautiful mountains in the east, and with sadder accents again addressed them. "Whatever, my children, be the events of the day, let neither sunshine nor storm tempt you to take shelter beneath that ruined building. At present you can hardly discern its outline, but when the sun shall have risen higher

in the heavens it will become clearer, and you will see much that is hidden from you now. I warn you, therefore, beforehand, that the flowers that grow there are poisonous, the huge stones ready at any instant to fall, and that everything about it is full of danger; and, above all, remember that though from this point it appear low and insignificant, when compared with the height immeasurable of the distant hills, yet if you stand close under it, they will be shut out altogether from your view. Do not imagine that when you once lose sight of them you can come back as soon as you wish it, and raise your eyes to them again: difficulties that you know not of will meet you on your way; nay, it may be that the day will close so suddenly that you will have no opportunity to return; and, should it be otherwise, there are strange sights and sounds in the neighbourhood of the wall, which will soon blot out the remembrance of all you now love to see and hear. You will gradually forget the distant hills, and the sweet notes of music that proceed from them; for there will be nothing to recall them to your minds. If, when your eyes grow heavy, be it sooner or later, you are still found lingering under the wall, sad indeed will be your fate; for, however long the night may be, you will then be unable to leave the spot where sleep shall first steal upon you; and to-morrow, when the trumpet sounds, the whole of that building will fall with violence to the ground, and those who lie under it will be crushed beneath its ruins. Do not, then, my dear children, allow for one instant the frail and perishable wall to intercept your prospect of the distant and eternal hills."

After this grave warning, the kind stranger gave to each child a flute, telling them that his Father loved to hear the voices of all his children, and that they must endeavour to take part in the music of the happy family that dwelt around his throne. He bade them also, if at any time they had carelessly wandered from the spot where he placed them, to think of him, and with sorrowful hearts to play upon these flutes, that so they might be brought back to it again; for that though they were afar off, and their voices very faint and feeble, still each note would find its echo among the mountains, and that he himself would never fail to send an answer to their song.

Now, as Rhoda and Minna raised their eyes to thank him for his gift and promise, they found they were alone. He had already left them, and was gone to the distant hills.

The sisters stood for a little while, holding each other by the hand, and meditated in silence on the words they had heard. They had thought first of all that it would be a very pleasant and easy task to watch continually the glorious view that opened upon them from the east, and to hope for their kind benefactor's return; and yet now they could not help trembling with an instinctive alarm at the warning he had given them about the dangerous wall. How very sad would be their fate, if on the morrow, when he came back to take them to their promised home, they should be found crushed to pieces by the ruin.

Rhoda was the first to endeavour to set this feeling aside. "Look, sister," she said, "at that dark mouldering pile of

bricks and stones; surely there is little there to tempt us from the green grass and pleasant flowers of the spot on which we are. Nay, had it not been pointed out to us, we should scarcely have observed it at all." But Minna raised her eyes very timidly, and replied, "Some danger there must be, or our kind protector would not have cautioned us against it. Remember that this is but the first beginning of our day; and he warned us, that while the sun was in the east, we should not be able to see clearly the things that grew upon the wall. Doubtless, under a clearer light, or if haply we approach nearer, it will seem brighter and more attractive than it does now. Let us, then, my dear sister, resolve to look at it no more, but at once to fix our gaze upon the distant hills."

As she thus spoke, she breathed lightly upon her flute, and a soft note of music proceeded from it: in an instant, the cloud that rested upon the mountains was stirred by a gentle breeze, and a strain of far sweeter melody was wafted back to the children. Then Rhoda also breathed upon her flute, and played it in harmony with that of Minna; and when the distant music was again heard in reply, both the sisters found pleasure in the thought, that they formed part of the same choir with the children who dwelt upon the hills, and that the kind stranger, according to his promise, was listening to their song

For the few first hours of their day of trial the two sisters lived happily together on the spot where they had been left: they had, indeed, but little temptation to wander from it: all was new to them; everything near seemed bright and

cheerful, and they gladly availed themselves of the permission they had received to enjoy their beauties. They did not begin by cultivating the ground, but gathered plenteously of the flowers that already grew there; many of the most beautiful withered at their touch, and there were thorns concealed in others which tore their hands; but so light and joyous were the hearts of the children, that each little pain and disappointment was no sooner felt than it was forgotten. Sometimes they would weave sweet garlands, and playfully entwine them in their hair; sometimes in the buoyancy of their spirits they would chase one another along the green turf; and, when they were weary, they would sit side by side under a myrtle, and listen to the warbling of the birds that fluttered among the branches.

During these periods, Minna would often contrast the sad and gloomy forest with the pleasant spot on which she was now permitted to dwell; and, while she meditated with gratitude on the stranger's kind promises, she would wonder how many hours might elapse before he came back for her again. Then she would softly whisper her thoughts to Rhoda, and remind her that their day might be short, and that they must practise continually on their flutes, in order that, on the morrow, their ears and voices might be in harmony with those of the happy family who already dwelt upon the distant hills. Rhoda never refused to accompany her sister; but she seemed to raise her eyes more languidly towards the east, and to listen less gladly than Minna to the answering melody that came from thence; nay, there were times at which it appeared doubtful whether she heard it at

all; her attention was drawn away by the rustling of the leaves, and the chirping of the birds; and the reason of this must have been, that even while her flute was at her lips, her heart was not meditating on the kind stranger's return.

There was, in truth, at this time, a very great difference between the two sisters, though their pleasures and occupations seemed to be the same. The mind of Minna was evidently fixed on her future home; she could not, indeed, pass her whole time in playing upon her flute, but she felt that the minutes given to amusement were in some sort dangerous, and was very careful lest her affections might be carried away by the pleasures which she was allowed to enjoy. Thus, she would often stop in the midst of her play, and raise her eyes, to be quite sure she was still in sight of the distant hills; when the flowers were sweetest, she would hold them up on high, and try to increase their fragrance by the perfumes wafted from the mountain breeze; and when the birds were singing most merrily around her, she would breathe gently on her flute, lest her ear might be too long captivated with the gladness of their song. But it was not thus with Rhoda: during the time passed in amusement the distant hills were forgotten, and she would probably, in her eagerness, have more than once lost sight of them altogether, if Minna had not warned her of her danger. Her eyes, too, were continually wandering towards the forbidden wall; its outline was gradually becoming less and less indistinct; and, if truth be told, it no longer appeared to her so destitute of attraction as in the first instance she had declared it to be.

Meanwhile the hours glided by; there was no sudden change; but the sun continued quietly on its course till the fresh breeze of the morning had given way to a bright and burning heat. The children knew not why, but they felt that they themselves were affected by the progress of the day. Their former joy and excitement were succeeded by feelings of restlessness and disappointment. The spot on which they stood seemed to them to have lost much of its cheerfulness and beauty, and they could no longer take delight in the same simple pleasures as before. Hitherto they had gone on in happy thoughtlessness, twining garland after garland; but they now observed that the fairest and sweetest flowers were always the first to fade, and so they gathered them no more. Their former games had lost their interest, nay, the air itself was too hot and oppressive to suffer them to play. Their very listlessness prevented either sister from having recourse to her flute, the music of which would at once have soothed her mind; and they were far too dispirited to seek employment in the cultivation of their garden; they sat idly together under their favourite tree, while each gave way to her own sad and discontented thoughts.

Minna looked from time to time, not on the hills themselves, but on the cloud that rested upon them: there it remained, quiet and beautiful as before. The prospect towards the east had in no respect altered since it had first excited the admiration of the children. But Minna now gazed with a longing desire to behold something more; she was half disposed to murmur that the glories of the summit of the mountain should still be concealed from her view;

and as she watched the cloud with this feeling, it seemed to fall lower, and to grow darker than before.

Rhoda, with yet more unquiet thoughts, was looking wistfully at the wall. Unlike the distant hills, it had greatly changed in appearance since the morning; for the whole outline had been now rendered clear and distinct by the glare of the noonday sun. It was a long irregular pile of building, very far from being altogether destitute of beauty; and though parts of it had been much impaired by time, few who looked at it from a distance would have discovered the dangerous state in which it was. Here and there were broken towers and buttresses, but the ruined parts of them were concealed by the dark leaf of the ivy; the mouldering stones were covered with soft and delicate mosses; while, from the chinks and crevices of the wall itself grew a variety of red and yellow flowers, which dazzled the eye by the gaudiness of their colours. All this attracted the admiration of Rhoda, and while she thus gazed, she forgot that the whole building was a ruin, which could stand only a single day, and that on the morrow those who were found near it would be crushed by its fall. She had indeed no immediate intention of approaching it, but her affections were already there, and some momentary impulse alone was required to cause her to follow them.

While her mind was in this state, a bright green lizard darted suddenly from a chink in the wall, and ran along its surface; for an instant it glittered in the sun, and then lay half-concealed beneath the leaves of the ivy. Rhoda sprang up, and seizing Minna by the hand exclaimed—"Look,



MINNA AND RHODA LOOKING AT THE RUINED WALL.

sister, look at that bright glittering creature! Nay, but it is hiding itself from us now; let us go a little nearer." As she said this she began to draw her sister down the hill. Minna had been too occupied by her own thoughts to observe Rhoda; she was now taken by surprise, and allowed herself to be hurried a little way towards the wall. She had not, indeed, seen the lizard, but she was anxious for something new, and her curiosity was excited by the admiration of Rhoda. Before, however, she had advanced many steps, she raised her eyes, as in walking she was wont to do, towards the distant hills. Great was her alarm when she found that the cloud on their summit was all that was now visible; the sides of the mountains were already hidden from her by her approach to the wall. "Stay, sister, stay," she said, "indeed we must go no farther, we cannot do so without losing sight of our happy home." Now, Rhoda was one step in advance of her sister, and as she raised her eyes, she found that not even the cloud itself was visible from the point on which she stood; yet this only seemed to increase her eagerness to get close to the wall. "A few steps farther," she urged, "will bring us to the very spot at which the lizard is concealed; we need only look at it for a single instant, and then we can return." But Minna replied, "Supposing in that single instant our day were to close, and the hour of darkness to arrive, how very terrible it would be to have to pass the long night under the wall, and on the morrow to be buried beneath its ruins."

Still Rhoda was not satisfied. "Sister," she said, "from the spot where the stranger left us we have watched the sun

rise gradually from the east; it has not yet reached the centre of the heavens; no mist or vapour is near it, and we can see nothing to impede its course; surely then it is most unlikely that its light should altogether disappear during the little while we are away." "But why," answered Minna, "why should we needlessly incur so great a risk? To do so were to neglect the warning the kind stranger has given us, of the uncertainty of our day: and even if many hours of light do remain, remember what he told us of the difficulties of a return. We do not, indeed, know what they are; but in part I can already understand them. Look behind us, and you will see that it will be no easy task to climb up that portion of the hill down which we have so thoughtlessly come. Every moment it appears to grow more steep and slippery than it was; besides, there is something oppressive in the air we now breathe that will unfit us for the effort: even my flute seems to feel its deadening influence; listen, how faint and languid is its sound."

As she thus spoke, she raised the instrument to her lips, and a few plaintive notes proceeded from it; they were in truth very feeble, but they found their echo among the eastern mountains. Rhoda heard it, and her heart was moved. The heavenly music had more effect upon her than even the affectionate entreaties of her sister; the tears rose so quickly in her eyes, that she no longer saw the dangerous wall; the temptation for the time passed away, and turning round, she, together with Minna, struggled resolutely up the steep ascent, until they came to the spot at which in the morning they had been left.

The sisters stood for a moment breathless with the haste they had made, but the mountain breeze soon refreshed them, and then they raised their eyes, and gazed fondly on the lovely prospect that was again open to their view. They did not forget to play upon their flutes a song of thanksgiving; and as the grateful strains were echoed among the distant hills, the cloud that rested upon them grew brighter and brighter, and there was a strain of gladness in the answering melody, as though the happy family that dwelt there were rejoicing at their return.



QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER I.

Q. What is signified by the condition of the children who were benighted in the forest?

A. The natural state of man, which is rendered dark and miserable by original sin.

Q. Who was the stranger that delivered them from the dangers to which they were exposed?

A. Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Q. Why is it said, that when He found them they were unable to speak or move?

A. Because we have no power to pray to Christ, or to rise and follow Him, without His special grace.

Q. What is meant by the river at the boundary of the wood?

A. The waters of Holy Baptism, through which Jesus Christ vouchsafes, as it were, to carry us in His arms from the state of nature to the state of grace.

Q. What other effect had the waters upon the children, besides washing away the stains from their garments?

A. It removed their weariness, and gave them new vigour and strength.

Q. In the same way, also, Holy Baptism not only purifies us from past sins, but endues us with the strength of the Holy Spirit, to enable us to walk in newness of life. Why did the stranger tell them that they were now the adopted children of His Father?

A. Because by Baptism we are made members of Christ and children of God.

Q. And what were those distant hills in the east, that He then pointed out to them?

A. Their inheritance in Heaven.

Q. Who were the happy family that already dwelt there?

A. The Holy Angels.

Q. Why is it said that a cloud covered the top of the mountains?

A. Because we cannot understand the joys of Heaven.

Q. Yes; though much has been revealed to us by our Saviour, there is still very much that we cannot yet realise in that blessed state for which we are preparing. We must still be content to see in part, and know in part, and exercise the virtues of faith and hope. What is signified by the place in which the stranger left the children?

A. The Church upon earth.

Q. It is there that our Saviour leaves those whom by Baptism He has admitted to His kingdom, to wait for His return. It forms, as it were, a sort of resting-place between the region of darkness, from which He has taken us, and those mansions of perfect light, which He has gone to prepare for us in Heaven. What is intended by the day and night that were to elapse before His return?

A. The day is the period of life—the night the period that will elapse between death and judgment.

Q. Why are they said to be of uncertain length, and what is meant by the changes of morning, noon, and evening, and the succession of sunshine and of storm?

A. The morning, noon, and evening, represent the several periods of childhood, youth, and age. The sunshine is prosperity; the storm, adversity; the day is of uncertain length, because we may die in childhood; the night, because we cannot tell how long we may rest in our graves before we are aroused from our sleep by the second advent of our Saviour.

Q. What was to be the employment of the children while the day continued?

A. They were to remain on the spot where they were left, and to gaze constantly on the distant hills, and to learn to love them more and more.

Q. What duty of Christians is this designed to teach us?

A. That while we are upon earth we must set our affections on things above, and so endeavour to prepare ourselves for Heaven.

Q. What is meant by the ground the children were to cultivate, and the flowers they were allowed to gather?

A. The occupations and pleasures which it has pleased God to give us in this life, and which only become dangerous when we so dwell upon them that they draw away our minds from thoughts of our Saviour.

Q. What is signified by the ruined wall?

A. The world.

Q. Yes, in that sense in which St. John speaks of it, when he tells us that "if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." And it is possible for those who are placed in the Church to live notwithstanding as children of the world; for we must remember that the Church upon earth does not secure us against temptations to evil; otherwise our Lord would not have compared it to a field in which the tares and wheat were growing together; and a net, in which good and bad fish were found. There is a world within it, and though Christians having been once baptized cannot again cross the stream, and return to the forest beyond, yet, by seeking that world, and by a neglect of the Gospel promises, they may forfeit all those privileges that their Baptism was intended to bestow. Now, why were the children forbidden to approach the wall?

A. Because the things that grew on it were poisonous, and the stones ready to fall; but chiefly because, if they came too near it, it would shut them out from the prospect of the distant hills.

Q. Remember, then, that in the same way the pomps and vanities of this world may shut us out from the contemplation of the far higher joys of Heaven; and things temporal may hide from us things eternal. What danger did they incur by disobedience?

A. They were told, that if they fell asleep beneath the wall, on the morrow it would give way, and they would be crushed to pieces by its fall.

Q. What do you understand by this?

A. That those whom death finds with thoir affections set

upon the world, will perish everlastingly in the day of judgment, when the world and the lust thereof shall pass away.

Q. What is signified by the flutes that were left with the children?

A. The gift of prayer, and other means of holding communion with God.

Q. Yes, and for these great blessings we are indebted to our Saviour. It is He who thus enables Christians upon earth to share the high privilege of the Holy Angels in Heaven; and to prepare themselves for that employment which will hereafter be their chief delight, when they are admitted to the presence of God. By the answering echo among the distant mountains, we are to understand that spiritual joy and comfort which sincere and earnest prayer never fails to afford us. Why is it said that the outline of the wall was indistinct during the morning?

A. Is it because during our infancy and childhood we cannot clearly see the dangers of the world?

Q. We not only cannot see its dangers, but we cannot even understand the nature of many of its temptations. God hides, as it were, from little children much that is impure and evil, while he opens to them at once the prospect of heaven. He gives them their early years to devote themselves to His service, and to prepare for trials to which they will afterwards be exposed. What do you understand by the description of the way in which Rhoda and Minna passed the morning?

A. They were allowed to enjoy quietly the pleasures of

childhood, and neither of them neglected the outward exercises of religion.

Q. So far they were both alike. What was the real difference between them?

A. The heart of Minna was with Christ, that of Rhoda inclined to the unknown vanities of the world.

Q. Yes; and in this way, sisters who are brought up together, receive the same instructions, say the same prayers, attend the same church, and whose daily occupations seem to be exactly alike, may already have wandered far from one another in the sight of God. They may appear to their friends to be treading the same path, because neither of them has yet fallen into any great sin, but the thoughts of their hearts may be very different; and we must remember that while man can only look on outward actions, God looketh on the heart. What do you understand by the apparent beauty of the wall when the sun shone upon it?

A. That in our youth the world offers many allurements to sin, and we cannot see the mischief that lurks beneath them.

Q. What is meant by the appearance of the lizard?

A. A sudden temptation to a worldly pleasure, to which in her youth Rhoda became exposed.

Q. And she yielded to it at once, without inquiring whether it were sinful, because her heart was already set upon the world. But why did Minna begin to follow her?

A. Because, although she was not, like her sister, coveting the forbidden pleasures of this life, she was dissatisfied with her indistinct perception of the joys of Heaven.

Q. This is signified by her complaint that the cloud still concealed the top of the mountains. Why is it said that, as she watched it with this feeling, it grew darker and sank lower than before?

A. It means that she knew less instead of more of heavenly things.

Q. Yes. When we murmur because we cannot see more than God has vouchsafed to reveal to us, we only darken our own understanding. How was Minna saved from approaching the wall?

A. She observed that it was gradually hiding the beautiful mountains from her view.

Q. Yes; and she observed this in consequence of her habit of raising her eyes towards the east. The best of us are liable to err. They alone are safe whose thoughts are so habitually directed heavenward, that they discover at once when they are about to lose sight of their promised home. How do you understand the arguments by which Minna tried to persuade Rhoda to hasten back to the spot where they had been left?

A. She reminded her that the day might close suddenly; meaning that though they were young and healthy, death might at any moment take them by surprise, and that after death it would be impossible for them to recover the bright prospect which they had lost.

Q. Why did she say that the hill was increasing in steepness behind them?

A. Because the return to virtue becomes more and more laborious the longer we defer it.

Q. You know what is meant by her playing upon her flute?

A. That she offered a sincere and earnest prayer for herself and her sister, which God in His mercy heard and answered.

Q. What do you understand by the tears of Rhoda preventing her seeing any longer the dangerous wall?

A. Sorrow for her past transgressions removed for a time the temptation to further sin.

Q. Why is it said that, when the children had returned from their wandering, there were strains of unusual gladness in the music of the distant hills?

A. Because we are told that there is joy in Heaven in the presence of the Angels of God over the penitent sinner.





CHAPTER II.

Sisters in blood and nurture too
  Aliens in heart will often prove:
One lose, the other keep, heaven's clue;
  One dwell in wrath, and one in love.

IT was only for a little while that the two sisters shared the same feelings of thankfulness and joy: no sooner had the first excitement passed away, than Rhoda grew weary of watching the distant hills, and suffered her eyes to wander back in the direction of the wall. Her having once approached it only increased the temptation to return; for there were many other objects besides the bright lizard which she had now half seen, but which she was unable to distinguish from the spot where the stranger had left her. The more she pictured them to herself, the more beautiful she fancied they must be; and she half regretted that she had not gone on to examine them when she was already so far on her way. She said within herself, "Oh that I had satisfied my curiosity once for all, and then I could have left the building without a wish to return to it again!"

These thoughts would, doubtless, of themselves have gradually led her on to fresh wanderings, and they proved but an ill preparation for the trial that was near at hand.

Hitherto the children had enjoyed so uninterrupted a sunshine, that they had almost forgotten to be thankful for so great a blessing: they looked upon it as their own, and it did not occur to them that in a few minutes it might pass away. But towards the afternoon a great change took place in the appearance of the day. A cold wind arose from the east, and there were dark watery clouds sweeping across the sky. Minna was the first to observe them. "Look, sister," she said, "how gloomy and threatening all around us has become; every instant the darkness seems to increase. I remember the kind stranger warned us that, as the day advanced, the sunshine might be followed by a storm. Let us then prepare ourselves to endure it. Already I can feel the first heavy drops of rain, the sign of its approach." She had scarcely finished speaking, when a vivid flash of lightning shot through the air. It was followed by a loud and angry peal of thunder; and then the tempest began in all its fury. The rain poured down in torrents: at the same time the wind increased, and the spot on which the children stood seemed more than any other exposed to its violence. Some trees were torn up by the roots, while large branches from others were broken off and carried away by the storm.

The two sisters stood for a moment in silent terror, and then Minna looked timidly around for a place of shelter; but Rhoda exclaimed, "The rain is slanting from the east, we

shall escape it under the shadow of the wall; follow me and you will be safe." Without waiting for a reply, she rushed



hastily down the hill, and took refuge under the ruin. Minna's first impulse was to follow her; but in an instant

she recollected the danger, and called out earnestly and loudly on her sister to return. Rhoda did not hear her, for the voice was lost in the noise of the wind. Minna then began to play upon her flute; but though each gentle note, even in the midst of the tempest, was echoed back from the distant hills, still the sound did not reach Rhoda as she stood under the shadow of the wall.

At length Minna was obliged to abandon the attempt to recall her sister, and began once more to look for some spot in which she might safely rest until the storm was over She did not look for it in vain. While she had been playing on her flute, a large cypress had been blown down by the wind. The trunk of the tree was now supported at one end by the upper boughs, and at the other by the roots which had been torn out of the ground. These, with the earth that still clung to them, offered an effectual protection from the rain. Minna crept beneath the thick branches, and sat down under the fallen tree; and as she sat there her heart was very full of heaviness and sorrow. She grieved because the bright sunshine of the day had passed and given place to cold piercing winds and a clouded sky; she grieved to see the trees that she loved stripped of their branches, and the green leaves scattered hither and thither, and her favourite flowers drooping under the violence of the storm; but most bitterly did she grieve for her sister, for she loved her very dearly, and she now feared that she never might behold her again. "Alas!" she said, "these showers may perhaps continue until sleep steals upon Rhoda in her dangerous lurking-place, and then when the new morning

arrives she will perish under the ruin." Yet, in the midst of her sorrow, Minna could find comfort in her grateful affection for her kind protector, and in gazing steadfastly on her future home. The sky did indeed look black and lowering, but one shining cloud there was, which was only rendered the more bright and beautiful by the surrounding darkness, and the child knew that it was the cloud that rested on the distant hills. When she breathed upon her flute, it was thence that the answering melody came; the sweet notes were borne back to her in an instant by the rushing wind, and they sounded no less clear and distinct than they had done in the stillness of the morning.

But let us leave Minna, and return to the history of her sister. After she had run down the hill, she had no difficulty in finding the shelter she sought. The wall was sufficiently high to afford a complete protection from the rain; but, alas! at the same time, it shut out from her the whole of the eastern view. It was with a feeling of solitude, and almost of terror, that she crouched for the first time beneath the mouldering ruin. She forgot all the beautiful objects that she had so lately longed to see; her head turned giddy with the strong scent of flowers and the buzzing of insects, and other strange murmurings that she heard; and her heart sickened at the thought that, perhaps, she never might return to her sister again. More than once she half resolved to begin the attempt, but the rain seemed to descend faster than ever, and Rhoda had not courage to face the storm.

She still, therefore, lingered on, until her ear became accustomed to the humming sounds, and her fears and

anxieties began to subside. She soon learned to forget the innocent joys of the morning, and the distant hills, and the heavenly music: her thoughts were confined to the narrow spot on which she stood, while, at the same time, all that the stranger had told her of its danger was scarce remembered at all. She now looked stealthily around, and began to examine the different plants and shrubs that grew upon the wall. There were some rich crimson mosses very near, and they were so unlike anything she had before seen, that they immediately attracted her attention. She raised her hand and touched one of them, and when it felt soft and delicate, she could not resist the temptation to gather it; yet she trembled exceedingly as she tried to separate it from the mouldering stone, for this was her first attempt to take anything from the ruin, and she half feared that it might altogether give way and crush her by its fall. There seemed, however, to be no immediate danger; the moss yielded at once to her slightest effort, and Rhoda pressed it gently to her cheek, and then concealed it in her bosom.

After this she gradually became bolder, and, leaving the place in which she had at first taken refuge, crept along the side of the wall. She entered into every nook and corner, and gathered abundantly of the strange flowers that she found. It seemed wonderful that she should think them beautiful; for neither the rose, nor the lily, nor the gentle harebell, nor the humble violet, were there; but rank weeds, and poisonous herbs, and shrubs that loved the darkness, and shrank from the cheerful light of day. All these, by some

strange infatuation, now proved attractive to the unhappy child; but one purple floweret there was, which she admired more than all the rest. She wove it into a chaplet, and entwined it in her hair. Alas! she knew not that it was the deadly nightshade!

Meanwhile the hours glided on; and when the noon had some time passed, the wind was lulled and the storm ceased. Minna left her place of shelter, and looked anxiously for her sister. It was some little while before she was able to distinguish her; at length, however, she caught a glimpse of her figure, half hidden among the leaves of the ivy; but Rhoda did not see Minna, for her eyes were too intently fixed upon the wall. Then Minna played upon her flute in the hope that the well-known sound might induce the wanderer to return; but though there was stillness in the air around, Rhoda heard neither the music itself, nor its echo among the mountains; her ear was no longer awake to the distant melody--it had been too much deadened by the low and confused murmurs that issued from the ruin.

She still, indeed, held her own flute in her hand, and every now and then would raise it hurriedly to her lips, but she cared not how irregular were the notes that proceeded from it: and she neither sought nor expected an answer to her song. Yet we must not suppose that she had determined to continue where she was during the rest of the day; for there were times at which she thought, with fear and trembling, of the danger of falling asleep beneath the wall. But she fancied the hour of slumber was still very far off, and that she might safely remain until the dim twilight warned

her of its approach. Then, she said within herself, she would hasten quickly away, and gaze once more upon the distant hills.

Even the reappearance of the sun, which her sister fondly fancied might remind her to come back, only brought with it a fresh temptation to linger near the building. Many thousand insects and reptiles, that had concealed themselves during the storm, now crept forth from their lurking-places, to bask in the sunshine. Rhoda recognised among them the bright green lizard. It stood still upon a projecting stone, and, turning round, fixed its sparkling eyes upon the child. She thought it would prove an easy prize, and advanced gently to take it in her hand; but, as she was approaching, the subtle creature glided along the surface of the wall, and again paused, and stood glittering in the light at a little distance from her. Rhoda followed it, and springing suddenly forward, imagined this time that the lizard could not possibly escape her; but in an instant it had darted away, and was concealed behind the ivy. A slight rustling in the neighbouring leaves betrayed the hiding-place to Rhoda. She crept onward to the spot, and looking cautiously among the branches, was just able to distinguish the object of her search. "Ah, silly creature," thought she, "you flatter yourself you have escaped me, but I have caught you at last." At the same moment she closed her hands upon the ivy, and doubled over the leaf that covered the lizard. She then tore it from the stem, and fancied that her wished-for prize was there. But she found that it was but an empty leaf which she held; the lizard was again

clinging to the wall, a little in advance of her, and looking bright and beautiful as ever.

In this way it gradually tempted the child on, always waiting for her, and always just eluding her grasp, until it had brought her to the fragment of an old tower, more dark and ruinous than anything she had yet seen. But Rhoda was too eager in her pursuit to observe its state of decay; nay, at the entrance she threw away the flute, which hitherto she had retained in her hand, because she fancied it had more than once prevented her seizing the lizard. She went into the tower, and saw the bright eyes again looking at her, from a projecting stone beyond her reach. Without a moment's hesitation she began to climb the wall. When she had reached a sufficient height, she clung with one hand to the ruin, while she tretched out the other to take the lizard. This time it made no effort to escape, and the delighted child took it, and placed it on the soft moss in her bosom; but no sooner had she done this than part of the building gave way; her feet and hands slipped, and she fell down, and the stone on which the lizard had been came rolling upon her. The unhappy child was crushed and bruised beneath its weight, and, as she attempted to rise, she found that her ankle had been sprained violently by her fall. She had just sufficient strength to crawl a few paces from the tower, and then, faint and dizzy with the intensity of the pain, she again sank upon the ground.

She remained there, senseless, for a little while. Alas! she was still under the shadow of the wall; and as the evening was stealing on, it seemed all hope of her escape

from it was at an end. But suddenly she was aroused from her stupor by the noise of distant music. It came from



the mountains in the far east, yet was unlike those gentle notes to which, in her bright and happy morning, Rhoda

had loved to listen; there was now the shrill blast of the trumpet, and the beat of the drum, and other sounds of war; they seemed to approach nearer and nearer, and to grow more terribly loud, while they rolled like thunder through the hollow places of the wall, until the large stones tottered as though its foundations were giving way. The child awoke in an agony of alarm. She imagined the night must have already passed, and that the new morning had arrived, and she expected every instant to be overwhelmed by the ruin. She attempted to rise, and in the struggle her hand rested on something that was lying near her; it proved to be the flute, which she had thrown down as she entered the tower. She took it with fear and trembling; and raised it to her lips, with an anxious wish that her kind protector might now listen to her song, and though her own ear was all too dull to catch the feeble sound that proceeded from it, it was heard and welcomed among the distant hills.

It seemed as though Minna must have heard it also, for she played one joyous strain upon her flute, and then began to hasten to the assistance of Rhoda. She paused, however, after she had advanced a few steps; for much as she loved her sister, she was afraid to venture in the neighbourhood of the wall; but as she raised her eyes towards the east, a new and glorious vision was open to her view. The beautiful mountains, and the cloud that rested on their summit, were reflected from above in the clear blue sky, so that the ruin could no longer conceal them, and still gazing steadfastly on her future home, she proceeded downward on her task of love.

When she reached her sister, after tenderly embracing her, she tore away from her garments all the strange shrubs and flowers that had been gathered from the wall. To Minna their smell was like that of the deadliest poisons, and such in truth they were. Rhoda breathed more freely when they were gone; happily she had already lost her wreath of nightshade in her fall from the tower. By the aid of her sister she was now able to rise, and while her ears yet tingled with the noise of the drums and trumpets, she slowly and painfully began her return. It was indeed a work of the greatest difficulty and labour; her limbs had been crushed and bruised under the weight of the stone, and she suffered the most acute agony from the sprain in her ankle. More than once she was tempted to stand still, or to throw herself despairingly upon the ground. But the ascent was so steep and slippery, that she felt, if she once ceased moving forward, she must slide back again to the ruin; and, while she recollected its dangerous state, the very pain she endured caused her to struggle the more earnestly to escape from it.

Minna would fain have carried her in her arms, as the kind stranger had done when he found them both perishing in the wood; but her own strength was far too feeble for so great an effort; she was only able now and then to assist and guide her steps, and ever to soothe and cheer her by the soft music of her flute. She tried, too, to point out to her the glorious vision in the eastern sky; but Rhoda sought for it in vain. To her eyes all above looked dark and gloomy—there was no reflection either of the beautiful hills or the bright cloud; still, however, she persevered in the

painful ascent, until the outline of the hills themselves appeared above the summit of the wall. Here her apprehensions began to subside; she looked round and imagined that if the building were to give way, none of the falling stones could reach her on the point where she stood; so she told her sister that she would wait there a little while until the pain in her ankle should cease. It was in vain that Minna entreated her to go on a few steps farther, that so they might rest on the very spot where the stranger had placed them. She replied that she was faint and weary, and that there could be no danger while they saw any part of the eastern mountains. So she sat down under the shade of a tree; and as she sat down, the wall again became a sufficient barrier to hide the mountains from her view.

Minna, when she found her entreaties of no avail, stood affectionately by the side of her sister, waiting till she had recovered strength to resume her journey. The tears rose quickly to her eyes, as she now had time to observe the change in Rhoda's appearance that her wanderings had produced. Not only were her garments soiled, and her limbs bruised, and her hands torn; but her cheek looked wan and pale, and she seemed altogether in a far worse state than when the stranger had saved her from the wood, and given her new life by washing her in the waters of the refreshing stream. Minna remembered, with a sigh, that there was no returning to those clear waters again; still, however, she did not despair that the health and strength of her sister might be restored, for there were herbs upon the distant hills which were a remedy for every disease and

sorrow, and Minna fondly hoped that the evening breeze would waft their fragrance to Rhoda, and so soothe her sufferings and assuage her pain, that when the night closed upon her, she might lie down in peace to rest. Alas! she did not know that her sister carried that in her bosom which would cause those freshening winds to blow upon her in vain.



QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER II.

Q. WHAT is meant by the morning sunshine which the children expected to continue throughout the day?

A. The peace and happiness of their early years, which caused them to forget that trials might await them in after life.

Q. What is the approach of the storm?

A. The coming of a time of trouble.

Q. Why are we told that the spot on which Rhoda and Minna stood was more than any other exposed to the wind and rain?

A. Does it not mean that it was their religion which exposed them to trouble?

Q. Yes. It often pleases God that a strict obedience to His commands should be a cause of present trouble to us. We may not, indeed, be called upon to lay down our lives for the sake of Christ, as were the holy martyrs of old; but we must still take up our cross in order to follow Him. If we are resolved to continue His faithful disciples, we must be content to endure many trials and afflictions which we might avoid at once by forsaking Him, and conforming

ourselves to the world. Now, what effect had the storm on Rhoda?

A. She took shelter beneath the dangerous wall.

Q. What effect had it upon Minna?

A. She remained on the spot where she had been left, and played upon her flute.

Q. Observe, then, that the very same trial caused one sister to seek refuge in the world, the other to have recourse to prayer; and the reason was, that the one in her heart loved the things of the world, while the other loved God. What is signified by the cypress-tree being blown down by the storm, and affording shelter to Minna?

A. That God, even out of affliction itself, can bring us comfort, if we pray for His assistance, and patiently wait for it.

Q. Yes, and will often, in the most unexpected manner, raise up a defence and protection to those who in quietness and confidence put their trust in Him. What is signified by the uneasiness and fears of Rhoda, when first she found refuge beneath the ruin?

A. The consciousness of having done wrong, and the dread of punishment.

Q. Why did she not at once hasten back?

A. Because she had not resolution to face the storm, from which the wall afforded her protection.

Q. That is to say, she was anxious for that peace of mind which religion alone could afford her, but would not make the sacrifice by which it was to be obtained. What do you understand by her head growing giddy with the smell of the flowers, and the buzzing of the insects?

A. The cares and pleasures of the world gradually overcame her better feelings, and made her forgetful of her danger.

Q. What is signified by the moss which Rhoda plucked from the ruin?

A. Some sinful pleasure in which she deliberately indulged.

Q. Why is it said that no part of the building gave way?

A. It means that she escaped punishment.

Q. Yes, and the consequence was, that she afterwards gathered abundantly of all the poisonous herbs that grew upon the wall. Such is too often the gradual progress of the sinner. He begins by refusing to make some sacrifice which religion requires of him, and thus for a time loses sight of his heavenly inheritance; he then becomes more and more worldly-minded, until the voice of the Spirit dies away in his breast; next he commits some deliberate act of sin, and so is led on to an habitually sinful life. When we once allow ourselves to neglect our duty to God, we cannot tell how very wicked we in a little while may become. Why are we told that the return of sunshine made Rhoda the more unwilling to quit the wall?

A. It means that prosperity only afforded her fresh temptations to continue in sin.

Q. What do you understand by her pursuit after the lizard?

A. That some evil passion, which she was resolved to gratify, led her on through a long course of wickedness.

Q. What is meant by her throwing down her flute?

A. That she gave up the outward form of praying to God.

Q. Yes, the spirit of prayer had long been absent from her heart; she now abandoned its words also; and she did this because they seemed to act as a restraint upon her in her pursuit of evil. What is signified by her falling from the tower directly she had obtained possession of the lizard?

A. That no sooner had she gratified her evil passion, than it pleased God to visit her sin with an immediate punishment.

Q. What effect had this upon Rhoda?

A. She hurried away from the ruined tower, and then sank upon the ground.

Q. From this we are to understand that the judgment which God sent in mercy, while it drove her away from a further commission of sin, overwhelmed her for a time with despair. What do you understand by the music from the east, that aroused her from her stupor?

A. The working of God's Holy Spirit in her heart.

Q. Yes, and the sounds are described as loud and terrible, because it pleased God to awaken her by the pangs of remorse, and the dread of His anger. How was Minna enabled to come to assist Rhoda without losing sight of the distant hills?

A. She saw them reflected in the sky.

Q. From this, then, we are to learn, that if we seek the company of sinners, with the sincere desire of bringing them back to the way of life, God will not suffer the evil we are forced to behold to hinder our contemplation of the joys of

heaven. What do you understand by Minna tearing away the shrubs and flowers from the garments of her sister?

A. She persuaded her to renounce her worldly pleasures.

Q. What is signified by the bruises and the sprain, which caused the ascent from the wall to be so painful to Rhoda?

A. The anguish of spirit, and the deep sense of shame, which were the consequences of her former sin.

Q. Why are we told that the ascent was so slippery that she could not stand still?

A. Because, when we resolve to amend our lives, we must struggle continually against our evil habits, or we shall fall into them again.

Q. Yes, it will not do to halt in the path of repentance; to hesitate to return to God, is, in truth, to suffer ourselves to be drawn back to the world. Why is it said that Minna was unable to carry her sister in her arms as the kind stranger had done in the morning?

A. Because none but our Saviour can deliver us from the bondage of sin. He may send others to point out the path, but it is His Spirit alone that can sustain us while we walk therein.

Q. What is signified by Rhoda sitting down to rest as soon as the distant hills appeared in view?

A. She was content with an imperfect repentance, and did not persevere unto the end. As soon as the immediate dread of God's wrath subsided, and her hopes of heaven were partially restored, she made no effort to grow in grace, and devote her whole heart to the service of Christ.

Q. What was the consequence of this?

A. That as she sat down her hope of heaven passed away, for she again lost sight of the distant hills.

Q. Observe, then, that while she stood up and continued her struggle against sin, she saw heaven; but labour and painful watchfulness were the only means by which God as yet permitted her to behold it; no sooner did she venture to rest, than, though she remained on the very same spot, she saw it no more. The whole path of repentance is beset with snares; but no point is more dangerous than that at which we first feel the burthen of our sins lessened, and the fear of punishment removed. We are then, like Rhoda, tempted to give way to the presumptuous thought, that we have done enough, and may rest a little while before we endeavour to increase in holiness. Alas! if we yield to this temptation, not only will the hope of heaven pass away from our hearts, but the evil spirit that has been driven from thence, finding them thus empty, will return again, and we shall soon fall into a worse state than before. Do you recollect the words of our Saviour to which I am now alluding?

A. Yes. He tells us that, when the evil spirit has been driven out of a man, he will after a time return, and if he find the house that he has left, empty, swept, and garnished, he will enter in with seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and take possession of it again.



CHAPTER III.

> Once gain the mountain top and thou art free ;
> Till then, who rest presume, who turn to look are lost.

THE pain in Rhoda's ankle began to subside after she had remained a few minutes under the tree; still she made no effort to resume the ascent; she seemed to be sitting in a kind of dreamy state ; her eyes were turned vacantly towards the dangerous wall, while every now and then her hands moved to and fro over her garments, as though she were feeling for her weeds and poisonous herbs, and wondering that they were gone. It was in vain that her sister gathered for her a nosegay of the sweetest flowers that grew around ; they were such as Rhoda once had loved to wear, but her sight and smell had been so affected by the noxious plants that grew upon the ruin, that they were lost upon her now. She thrust them fretfully aside, and said, with truth, that she could not discover in them either fragrance or beauty.

Still Minna would not forsake her sister ; and at length, by her earnest entreaties, she persuaded her to rise. Rhoda even then appeared to hesitate whether to recede or ad-

vance, but Minna led her gently a few steps farther up the slope, until they stood on a spot where the wall no longer



deadened the force of the eastern wind, and the whole outline of the beautiful mountains could clearly be discerned. Here the children again paused; Minna's heart

beat high with a mingled feeling of anxiety and joy; she could not help herself rejoicing once more in the glory of the view, but when she turned for sympathy to her sister, she found no flush of pleasure on her face; she had merely raised her eyes for a single instant towards the east, and had then looked down and fixed them steadfastly on the wall.

Minna could hardly suppress her tears of disappointment, but she made one more attempt to move the heart of Rhoda; she breathed upon her flute, and proposed that they should unite in one of those thankful songs which they had often played together during their bright and happy morning. Rhoda raised her flute to her lips, but the notes that proceeded from it were very harsh and full of discord, when compared with the sweet music of her sister, and they found no echo among the distant hills; for at the very moment that she sent them forth, her eyes were still fixed downward upon the ruin. She soon, therefore, grew weary of playing, and began to retire slowly towards the tree she had left. But Minna once more seized her hand, and pressing it fondly to her lips entreated her to remain. "Stay, dearest sister," she said, "do not venture one step backward towards the forbidden wall; from this spot you may behold the beautiful mountains; see how noble is their outline, and how lovely the tints that are now shed upon them by the western sun! Only gaze on them steadfastly, and our kind protector who dwells there will watch you, and comfort you; he will soothe you with the soft voices of the children who are around him, and though you feel sick and weary, he will restore you to

your health and strength. The very breeze that he is now sending us is full of freshness and life; do not suffer the wall to screen you from it again." But Rhoda replied, "Sister, in the morning I loved with you to gaze on the distant hills, but I can now perceive no beautiful variety in their colouring: one dark shadow is resting upon them all, and their loveliness is gone. In the morning the music sounded to me, as to you, like the soft voices of children; but now when I hear it at all, it rings terribly in my ears, as the war-cry of some mighty host, and I tremble while I listen to it. In the morning I rejoiced with you in the freshness of the eastern breeze, but now, alas! it blows so cold and cheerless on my breast, that I fain would shelter myself from it, even under the shadow of the wall."

As she said this she pressed her garment more closely to her bosom, and immediately the lizard, that she had concealed there, came forth from its lurking-place and looked wistfully around. Minna uttered a scream of surprise and terror. "Oh, Rhoda!" she exclaimed, "cast that reptile from you; remember that it is an inhabitant of the wall; it may haply be the cause that the winds have lost their freshening influence, the music its softness, and the mountains their beauty." The lizard was startled at the voice of Minna, and gliding quickly to the ground, ran a few yards down the hill, and then turned round and looked at the children. Rhoda coloured very deeply as she replied, "Nay, Minna, I did not feel the touch of the lizard, and had in truth forgotten that it was in my bosom. It must have been lying between my garment and some beautiful moss that I

gathered from the wall." "But why," answered Minna, "should you thus cherish a moss that once grew upon the ruin? we cannot tell what subtle poison it may contain. Oh, sister! even if it cling to you so closely that you must rend your garment in order to take it away, still pluck it out, and throw it from you, and open your bosom to the mountain breeze."

Rhoda hesitated; she still loved Minna, and could scarcely help yielding to her affectionate request; alas! in the moment of doubt, she did not raise her eyes or play upon the flute, but looked listlessly on the ground. There, once more, the bright lizard met her view: it had remained on the spot to which it had run when startled by her sister's voice, and seemed as though it longed to return to her, but was afraid to venture. All Rhoda's better thoughts passed away in a moment; she struggled to withdraw her hand, and impatiently exclaimed, "You know, Minna, that even now I can scarcely bear the keen blasts of the wind; why, then, should I part with my warm and beautiful moss? It is so soft and pleasant that I am sure it must be innocent—but let us speak of this another time. That beautiful lizard is waiting for me to come to it, and if it be but to bid adieu to it for ever, I will caress it once more." It was in vain that Minna pointed sorrowfully to the west, and reminded her how much of the day was already gone. Rhoda had forgotten the long chase of the morning, and the thousand arts by which the deceitful reptile had tempted her on; she was sure that she could overtake it in a moment, and then promised to come back and remain by the side of her sister.

Doubtless she intended to do so, and under this delusion she went away, and was led gradually to the ruin; but she never returned from it again.

Minna used every effort to detain her, and it was not until Rhoda, in her struggles to escape, began to drag her also down the slope, that she was forced to release her hold. She raised her eyes, and saw that the image of the bright cloud and distant hills had now faded from the sky: she knew, therefore, that she must not again approach the ruin, for she could not do so without losing sight of her promised home; but, with a heart full of anguish, and the tears streaming down her cheeks, she watched her sister's receding steps.

Rhoda's path downward proved very smooth and easy; even her wounds and bruises were forgotten for a time, and the sprain of her ankle no longer impeded her walk; the green lizard kept enticing her on, always creeping a few steps farther as she stopped to take it in her hand: it led her by all the steepest parts of the descent, so that even had she wished she could not have stood still; but it seemed to Minna that she did not once pause in the pursuit, nor cast a single look behind. In a few minutes she had traced her to the wall; she watched her hurrying along its side until Rhoda again entered the ruined tower and was hidden from her view.

She then turned away and felt very sorrowful; but her heart would have been still heavier had she been permitted to know the remainder of her sister's history. It is in truth a very painful one. The green lizard did not this time

remain in the ruined tower, but, passing through it, still glided along the side of the building to other parts, which were in a yet more dangerous state. Rhoda was resolved to follow it; her path, indeed, was no longer smooth and



easy, as it had been while she was descending the hill; but she had gone so far that she would not abandon the pursuit. Alas! half the pains that she now bestowed upon it, might have enabled her to get back again to that spot on which alone she could be safe. Sometimes she had to climb over

loose slippery stones, and at others to crawl on her hands and knees through narrow crevices in the wall; her eyes were filled with dust and dirt, and her limbs sorely bruised by fragments of the building that kept rolling upon them. She very often lost her footing and fell heavily upon the ground, but no sooner did she rise again than she still struggled on. The unhappy child seemed insensible alike to pain and danger, until faint, breathless, and weary, she once more held the beautiful lizard in her grasp.

She now for the first time paused, and the feeling of joy and triumph, caused by her success, gave way in a moment to a sensation of alarm. She had come she knew not whither, and it seemed hopeless to think of retracing her steps. Her flute was gone; she could not even tell where she had left it, but only had an indistinct recollection of having thrown it aside after one of her falls. An unusual swarm of noisy insects were buzzing around her, and the shrubs that clung to the side of the building yielded a more noxious odour even than those which she had gathered in the morning. Yet it was none of these things that first gave rise to her alarm; but it was the terrible darkness that began to steal upon her. When she had left her sister, the sun had far to travel before it sank to rest; and, though the pursuit had occupied her longer than she was aware of, the hour of twilight had not yet really arrived. But the eminence that rose behind the wall excluded it altogether from the western light, no ray of the setting sun was ever reflected upon it, and the early evening was so dim and cheerless, that Rhoda imagined the night had already closed in. Still, not even

now could she resolve to make one vigorous effort to escape; she struggled against her own sad fears, and thought she would yet play for a few minutes with her favourite lizard before she began to return.

She tried to be calm; but her limbs shook and her heart sank within her, as she gradually unclosed her hand. The lizard did not move: she looked at it, but the green skin no longer glittered, and the brightness of its eye was gone; she touched it, and it felt clammy and cold—the lizard was dead. No tears fell from Rhoda, for she could not weep for it. Her delight in its former beauty was now succeeded by a feeling of horror; she turned away her face, and said within herself, "Is it, then, for this perishable object that I have gone through so many dangers, and abandoned the hope of my promised home?"

She now in haste began to climb the hill; but the ascent, at the point to which she had come, was very steep, and covered with loose rolling stones; it slanted down close to the very foot of the ruin; there was no intermediate space between them; the stones slipped under the feet of Rhoda every step that she took. Fear inspired her with a momentary strength, but all her efforts proved fruitless; sometimes she advanced a little way; but no sooner did she stop to breathe, than she again slid back, so that after much labour and weariness, she still found herself standing beneath the dangerous wall.

We cannot wonder that it was so, for she did not pause to search for the flute that she had thrown aside: the distant hills and their soothing music had passed away altogether

from her mind. She felt, indeed, the extent of her danger, and longed to get back to the pleasant spot on which she had spent the morning of her day, but she could not fix her affections on that kind protector who had promised if she called out for his aid, to assist her to return.



QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER III.

Q. WHY is it said, that as Rhoda sate under the tree she began to search again for the poisonous herbs which she had gathered from the wall?

A. It means that while she paused in the path of repentance she suffered her mind to wander back to the worldly pleasures which she had enjoyed, and to regret their loss.

Q. Why could she find no beauty or fragrance in the sweet flowers that Minna brought her?

A. Because her mind had been so tainted by the continued gratification of evil passions, that she could no longer take delight in simple and innocent amusements.

Q. Yes. This is one punishment which is sure to follow the long indulgence of sin. Those who forsake an evil habit must not expect to be so happy as they would have been if they had never formed it; for its effects will remain so as to unfit them for many pleasures which they might otherwise have enjoyed. How did Minna try to comfort her sister?

A. She persuaded her to play upon her flute, and to watch the distant hills, and welcome the eastern breeze.

Q. That is to say, she bade her have recourse to prayer, and to fix her affections on heavenly things, and await the influence of God's sustaining Spirit. Though earthly occupations and amusements cannot cure the disease that sin leaves in the soul, and we have recourse to them in vain, God, in His mercy, has provided us with a remedy. If we fix our thoughts on our Saviour, and pray to Him earnestly, He will sooner or later turn our sorrow into joy. But why is it said that when Rhoda did play upon her flute, it produced no echo among the distant hills?

A. Because, when she prayed to God with her lips, her heart was far from Him, and, therefore, her prayer was unanswered.

Q. And why are we told that she saw a dark shadow resting on the eastern mountains, and that the wind that blew from thence seemed cheerless and cold?

A. She was cherishing, in secret, sin that she had professed to renounce, and, therefore, she could find no comfort in religion, but it only awoke in her mind gloomy thoughts and a fear of the judgments of God.

Q. How is the secret sin that she cherished represented in the allegory?

A. By the moss and the lizard that she had concealed in her bosom.

Q. Yes. And we may observe that, though she knew of the presence of the moss, she was not aware that the lizard was lying upon it. That is to say, that while there was one evil passion which she was conscious of and would not renounce, there was another unobserved even by herself,

and seen only by the Searcher of hearts. From this we may learn the necessity of self-examination and earnest prayer to God, that He will deliver us from our secret faults; otherwise they remain in our breast, and go on infecting us with their poison, and gaining a silent dominion over us, while we are ignorant that they are there: this is a danger to which we are more especially exposed, when, as was the case with Rhoda, we wilfully cherish some one sinful affection, however trifling it may seem. What is signified by the lizard coming forth from its lurking-place?

A. That a new temptation brought to light the evil passion that lurked in the bosom of Rhoda.

Q. What is meant by her resolution to caress the lizard once more before she parted with it for ever?

A. She determined that she would once again taste the pleasure of sin before she finally renounced it.

Q. Thus Satan often makes men believe that they are about to indulge in some favourite sin for the last time, and does not allow them to see how far in the ways of wickedness that one indulgence may lead them. Why is it said that Rhoda's path downward was smooth and easy?

A. Because it is easy to return to the sins we have left.

Q. Yes. There is nothing painful or difficult in giving up the struggle of repentance, and allowing ourselves to fall back upon the pleasures of the world. We are not only by nature prone to sin, but there is always an increased liability of our returning to those evil habits which we have once suffered to gain dominion over us; and for this reason it is said that Rhoda did not once pause and look back during

the steep descent. But why are we afterwards told that she found so much trouble and weariness in her pursuit after the lizard?

A. Does it not mean that, though the attempt to gratify our evil passions seems so pleasant at first, it will in the end make us anxious and miserable?

Q. It does so. Many have found, with Rhoda, that it would not only have been safer, but easier, for them to have persevered in the up-hill path of repentance, than to have followed out those crooked and dangerous ways for which they were persuaded to leave it. What do you understand by the increasing darkness which Rhoda observed as soon as she had caught the lizard?

A. No sooner had she gratified her evil passion, than the fear of death began to steal upon her.

Q. Did this cause her at once to hasten from the wall?

A. No. She still thought she would continue a little while longer in the enjoyment of sin before she attempted to return.

Q. Thus it is that those who begin by wilfully putting off the time of repentance from year to year, still go on deferring it a little while longer, even when they feel their lives to be drawing to a close, and they count by months instead of years the short season they are to remain upon earth. Many who are young and healthy imagine that if sickness or old age were to come upon them, they would have no difficulty in forsaking the world and fixing their affections upon God. So Rhoda had once believed. And yet when the evening approached, she found repentance no less

difficult than before. But why, even if it were easier to return to the service of God in age than in youth, would it be a dangerous thought for us to dwell upon?

A. Because we have no certainty that we shall not die in childhood.

Q. We must never forget that it may please God to suffer the night to close suddenly upon us without allowing us the gradual succession of morning, noon, and evening, which He afforded Rhoda. What do you understand by the death of the lizard?

A. That sin lost its pleasure.

Q. Yes; though the stains of sin, unless we repent, will remain with us for ever, the pleasures of it endure but for a season. We may go on refusing to forsake them until they, in a manner, forsake us, their beauty passes away, and we can enjoy them no more. Then, like Rhoda, we shall look back upon them with disgust and horror, and think bitterly of the fearful price at which they were obtained. What is meant by her sudden attempt to climb the hill from the point where she was standing?

A. An effort to escape from the terrible judgments denounced against sin.

Q. Why, then, did she not succeed?

A. Because she did not first of all try to have recourse to prayer, and to fix her thoughts upon her Saviour.

CHAPTER IV.

Ever the richest, tenderest glow,
  Sets round the autumnal sun—
But there sight fails; no heart may know
  The bliss when life is done.

WHILE Rhoda was struggling in vain to ascend the hill, the darkness gradually increased, and she grew more and more alarmed. She cast a fearful glance around, and feeling the full misery of her loneliness, began to think, with bitter regret, of the flute that she had lost. For a few minutes she groped her way over the fallen stones, and sought anxiously for it among the crevices of the wall: happy would it have been for her had she persevered in the search; but she met with so many unexpected difficulties that she relinquished it in despair. Not only was there so thick a darkness that she could hardly see her path; but every time that she stooped down to feel for her flute, the swarm of insects that had hitherto only buzzed around her, began to worry her with their stings, her eyes were so swollen that she was almost blinded with pain, while the sharp flint stones pierced her hands, and more than one serpent crawled from



its lurking-place and bit her with its poisoned fang. We cannot think it strange that Rhoda should soon have abandoned so painful a search, when we remember that in the afternoon, while the sun yet shone brightly upon her and she was cheered by her sister's voice, she wanted resolution to advance the few steps which might then have brought her to a place of security.

She now crept into a hollow part of the ruin, and sitting down on a fallen stone, resolved to await quietly the approach of night. But she found that in quiet she could not await it; she whispered peace to her heart, but no peace was there; thoughts of terror would arise, and it was impossible for her to drive them away. It was in vain that she tried to believe that the spot on which she rested was free from danger, and that the wall would afford her a sure protection during the long hours of the night; the huge fragments that continually crumbled away mocked her idle hopes, and the wind that howled among the mouldering stones seemed to echo back the warning which had been given her, that, if in the morning she were found beneath them, she would be crushed to pieces by their fall. It was a terrible thing to sit helplessly down and await so miserable a fate. Rhoda felt that it was so, and her heart was full of bitterness; neither could she find any joy or comfort in the present hour, to relieve the dreary prospect of the future. I have already said that the cheerful light of evening was never shed upon the wall. A thick heavy fog now rested on it, and noxious vapours were fast rising from the ground. All was cold and wretched. The rank herbs, at the approach

of night, sent forth the most strong and deadly odours, and Rhoda felt that she was breathing poison. Meanwhile the flowers had lost their gaudy colouring, and the beauty of everything that had once attracted the love and admiration of the child, like that of the green lizard, had passed away.

Even while she was indulging these sad thoughts, she felt something move upon her bosom; she hastily thrust in her hand, and found that the soft bright moss, which she had placed there in the morning, and refused to part with at the request of Minna, had become a mass of rottenness and decay, and that slimy worms were crawling out of it. She now threw it from her with loathing and disgust, and, springing from her seat, made one more effort to escape from the fatal ruin. But the noxious vapours had already taken their effect; she staggered to and fro, and knew not whither she was going; for a few moments she leaned for support against the wall, and then a thick mist obscured her sight, and she sank down in a heavy slumber close beneath the ruin.

It is a pleasing task to turn our eyes from this sad picture, and gaze upon the soft sunset of the day of Minna. During the afternoon her employment had been to sweep away the withered leaves from the ground, and to prop the broken boughs and nurse the plants that had been injured by the storm. She found more real pleasure in this quiet occupation than she had done in the joyous sports of the morning. It was, too, one of which she did not grow weary; no listlessness followed it; the flowers gradually increased in beauty, as though to thank her for her care, until the

ground assumed the appearance of a garden, and the child felt more and more grateful to the kind protector who had placed her in so fair a spot, to wait for his return. She did not now make nosegays of the flowers, or weave them into perishable garlands, but she learned to watch their silent growth, and inhale their fragrance without a wish to gather them. Still there were times when some favourite plant, even while she looked at it, began to wither and die; and then she would raise her wistful eyes towards the distant hills, and longed for those brighter flowers which blossomed there but could not fade.

Minna had left these peaceful occupations for a little while in order to assist Rhoda to escape from the wall. It had been the one wish of her heart that the sister who had been her playfellow in the morning should come back and pass the quiet hours of the evening with herself. When all her hopes were disappointed, and she a second time lost sight of Rhoda, she wept bitterly and was very sorrowful. It was in vain that she returned to the garden which she had cultivated; her favourite flowers failed to afford her the same pleasure as before; beautiful as they were, there was now a void in her heart that their loveliness could not satisfy. But Minna knew where to turn for comfort; she breathed upon her flute, and the soft and solemn music that floated back from the east seemed to sympathise with her own sad thoughts. She felt that she was not really alone; the unseen choir of children who dwelt afar off were sharers in her sorrow: one chord of affection had been snapped asunder, but she knew that those which united her

to her kind protector and his happy family would remain unbroken for ever.

Such thoughts afforded joy and peace to Minna, even in the midst of her tears, and as the evening closed in, she dwelt upon them more and more. A soft languor began to steal upon her, and now she gave up her employment in the garden, and passed her time in playing glad songs upon her flute, and watching the beauties of the surrounding view. The very same hours that Rhoda found so dark and terrible, breathed upon her a pure and holy calm. There were no damp fogs, no unhealthy vapours rising from the ground, no noxious smells, no swarm of insects buzzing in the air. Bright as had been the morning of the day, the evening far surpassed it in its quiet loveliness. Minna could see by the western light the clear stream that she had crossed in the morning, while in the distance was the dim outline of the forest from which she had escaped. Her heart was very full of gratitude; one short day had passed since the wild beasts were howling around her, and now that a new night was approaching, she could lie down without fear, for her kind protector had promised to watch over her sleep. But it was towards the east that the eye of the child was more frequently turned. There on the morrow would be her dwelling-place. The beautiful mountains, when seen by the indistinct twilight, appeared to be brought nearer than before, and there was a fringe of gold on the cloud that rested upon them, as it caught the last rays of the setting sun. The song of the birds was hushed, and no sound broke the stillness of the evening but the gentle notes

of Minna's flute, and the clear soft music that was wafted back to her from the distant hills.

The child gradually yielded to the soothing influence of the scene; her languor increased; she sank down upon a bed of violets, and having raised herself for a moment to gaze earnestly upon the east, she closed her eyes in a soft untroubled sleep.

The hours of night passed slowly on, the pale moon and the stars appeared, and Minna still continued in the same quiet repose. No new trials or temptations could befall her; there were to be no more changes of joy and sorrow: she had been weary, but she was now at rest—and so refreshing was that rest, that all signs of her former care and anxiety passed away; the traces of the tears that she had shed were gone; and as the soft moonbeams played upon her face, it shone with a bright and holy loveliness. She slept quietly on, but it was not the heavy sleep of unconsciousness and oblivion; a warm breeze from the mountains fanned her cheek, and the songs that she had loved still floated in the air. The smile of hope yet lingered on her features while they were hushed in the stillness of sleep; and she slept as one who so rested from her labours, that she was ready to arise at the first appearance of dawn; who enjoyed the tranquillity of the night, but was dreaming all the while of the life and gladness of the morning.

And Rhoda also slept, but her slumbers were very different from those of Minna. There was no peaceful security, no refreshing quietness in her repose. As the night advanced, her features only became more wan and haggard than before,

as though the troubles of the day and the fears and anxieties of the evening had formed themselves into dreams and visions that disturbed her rest. It may be that she still fancied she was struggling to escape from the wall; but she could now only weary herself with the imaginary efforts of a dream. She remained powerless on the ground, and all her restlessness could not move her one step from the spot on which she had sunk to repose. The stranger had warned her that this would be the case: in the morning he had brought her to a place of security which, in the folly of her heart, she had wilfully left: the hours of darkness had arrived, and it was now impossible for her to return. She had abandoned the prospect of the distant hills, and from this time forth she would see them no more; she had refused to listen to the heavenly music, and she would never be allowed to hear it again. During the day-time she had taken up her portion with the fatal ruin; it was there she had spent the evening; it was there that slumber had overtaken her, and she was now forced to sleep beneath it until it should give way and crush her by its fall.

Minna and Rhoda still slumber, for that trumpet has not yet sounded which alone can wake them from their repose. We cannot farther pursue their history, but we must think of them as sleeping at this very moment, the one within view of the beautiful mountains, the other under the dark shadow of the wall. The building has become very old and ruinous, but it is still permitted to remain. The day

of the children passed quickly by; but their long night may not even now be drawing to a close; no one can number its silent hours, or tell how near or how distant the dawn of the morrow may be



QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER IV.

Q. WHAT do you understand by Rhoda groping her way in search of her flute?

A. That she wished to resume the habit of constant prayer, in order that God might enable her to repent.

Q. Why, then, as she now chose the right means, did she still fail in her attempt?

A. Because she had not grace to persevere; for we are told that she soon abandoned the search, on account of the stinging insects, the sharp flint stones, and the serpents which opposed her progress.

Q. By these, then, we are to understand those temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, against which they will have to contend who, after having long taken up their portion with the world, endeavour in the evening of life to turn themselves unto God. There will be the mockery of their former companions, and their own evil habits, and, in addition to these, the thoughts of terror and despondency which Satan himself will stir up in their hearts. What is meant by Rhoda taking shelter in the crevice of the wall?

A. She gave herself over to despair.

Q. What is meant by her trying to persuade herself that she might sleep in safety beneath the ruin?

A. She endeavoured to disbelieve the reality of a day of judgment, and to imagine that the present world would continue for ever.

Q. Did she succeed in doing so?

A. No, for the crumbling stones continually warned her that the building, sooner or later, would crush her by its fall.

Q. Remember, then, that wilful and unrepented sin will bring those who have once tasted the knowledge of the truth into this awful state. They will wish to doubt all that they formerly loved to believe; but they will really be unable to do so. In spite of themselves, each change will remind them that the world in which they trust is fast passing away, and when their last hope of the promises of the Gospel is gone, "a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation" will still remain. Did not Rhoda after this make one last effort to escape from the wall?

A. Yes; when she found that her favourite moss had become putrid and corrupt; but this time sleep overpowered her and she sank beneath the ruin.

Q. That is to say, she died in her sins. We must not, however, imagine from this that any period of time is too short for the really penitent to obtain the forgiveness of God; we know that with Him a thousand years are as one day, and one day as a thousand years. Had Rhoda been able to repent, her last staggering footsteps might have

carried her beyond the reach of the fall of the ruin; for there was One who was both able and willing to support them, if she could put her trust in Him. But by constant neglect of warnings and long continuance in sin, her heart had been hardened, so that she found no place for repentance, and even the near approach of death awakened in her only remorse. Such, alas, it is to be feared, is the case with too many who imagine that their thoughts and feelings in old age or sickness will be different from those which they have cherished during the whole of their lives. Let us now return to Minna. What is meant by her cultivating the ground when the storm has passed by?

A. That she learnt from adversity to seek pleasure in doing good to others.

Q. And why are we told that the flowers she loved best still withered and died?

A. Is it because in this life not even charity itself can secure us from disappointment?

Q. It is so. And God has doubtless ordained that it should be so, in order to teach us, like Minna, to fix our best hopes and affections upon Heaven. What do you understand by the period when she gave up her employment in the garden?

A. The time when sickness interrupted her earthly occupations, and she was able to devote herself entirely to prayer and holy meditation.

Q. What is meant by the beauty and quietness of the evening?

A. The peaceful end of the righteous.

Q. It is not, however, any outward peace that is here referred to; for good men may, like the holy martyrs, die in the midst of much apparent pain and suffering. But, whatever be their bodily anguish, they will have within the peace of God that passeth man's understanding. The distant hills will seem to approach near them, and the fringe of gold will rest upon the cloud. Do you remember the vision that cheered the last moments of St. Stephen?

A. It is said that he saw the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

Q. Yes, and though he was killed by stones, nothing could be more tranquil than the description of his death; it is merely written that "he fell asleep." Can you recollect any parable of our Saviour in which death is spoken of as a period of sleep?

A. That of the wise and foolish virgins. We are told that while the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.

Q. And so also in the Old Testament, in speaking of the deaths of the kings of Israel and Judah, it is generally said of each of them, that "he slept with his fathers." Thus, then, we may regard the good and bad alike as sleeping from the hour of death to the day of judgment. They have to wait till the night is over, before they are either received into their happy home or crushed by the fall of the ruin. This will be the case with all except those who will still be found upon earth at the second advent of Christ. But is there any other parable which appears to imply that there will be a consciousness in that sleep?

A. That of the rich man and Lazarus.

Q. Yes, the rich man is certainly spoken of as sensible of pain; and though Lazarus was conveyed to the bosom of Abraham—a place that gives us the idea of the most perfect rest—it would seem to be implied in the narrative that he is in a state of consciousness. But there is a passage in the book of Revelation, which, so far as we can enter into the depth of its meaning, expressly speaks of the holy martyrs as disturbed in their rest, by their anxious longing for the day of judgment.

A. "They cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not return and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled."[1]

Q. From all this, then, we may learn that, to those who die before Christ's second coming, there will be a certain interval between the time of their trial upon earth, and the day at which they will finally render in their account to God; and further it would appear, that during this interval, the good and the bad, will alike have their visions; the one of hope, the other of anguish and terror. How is this represented in the allegory?

A. By the smile that rested on the features of Minna, and the troubled sleep of Rhoda.

Q. Why is it said that Rhoda could then make only the imaginary efforts of a dream?

[1] Rev. vi. 10, 11.

A. Because nothing that we can do after death will enable us to escape the punishment due to our sins.

Q. Yes. It will be then impossible for us either to change from the service of God to the service of Satan, or from the service of Satan to the service of God. During this life some are walking within view of the distant hills, while others afar off are dwelling under the shadow of the wall. And, though to us they may appear to be treading the same paths, there is doubtless a gulf which separates them, that is seen by the Searcher of hearts. But while they continue upon earth, we believe that many move to and fro across it, according as Satan leads them into sin, or God gives them grace to repent. That deep gulf will become impassable in another world, and each will remain for all eternity on the same side of it on which in the hour of death he was found.

THE OLD MAN'S HOME.

"*For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.*"

HEBREWS xi. 14.



THE UNDERCLIFF, ISLE OF WIGHT.

CHAPTER I.

> Each in his hidden sphere of joy or woe,
>   Our hermit spirits dwell and range apart;
> Our eyes see all around in gloom or glow—
>   Hues of their own, fresh borrow'd from the heart.
>
> CHRISTIAN YEAR.

THERE is a scene on the coast of the Isle of Wight with which I have long since become familiar, but which never fails to exercise a soothing influence on my mind. It is at the eastern extremity of the landslip. Large portions of the cliff have fallen away, and formed a dell so broken and irregular, that the ground has the appearance of having at one time been agitated by an earthquake. But Nature has only suffered the convulsion to take place, in order that afterwards she might bestow her gifts upon this favoured spot with a more unsparing hand. The wild and picturesque character of the landscape is now almost lost sight of in its richness and repose. The new soil is protected from the storms of winter by the cliff from which it has fallen, and, sloping towards the south, is open to the full warmth and radiance of the sun. In consequence of this, the landslip

has, as it were, a climate of its own; and often, when the more exposed parts of the country still look dreary and desolate, is in the enjoyment of the blessings of an early spring. Such was the season at which I first visited it. The gray fragments of rock which lay scattered on the ground were almost hid by the luxuriance of the underwood, and countless wild flowers were growing beneath their shade. Below, the eye rested upon a little bay, formed by the gradual advance of the sea: and all was so calm and peaceful, that as I watched the gentle undulation of the waters, I could fancy them to be moving to and fro with a stealthy step, lest they should disturb the tranquillity of the scene.

I have said that a visit to this favoured spot never fails with me to have a soothing influence. I feel as though I were treading on enchanted ground, and the whole scene were allegorical: for it reminds me that, in like manner, the wreck of all our earthly hopes and plans may but lay open our hearts to the influence of a warmer sunshine, and enrich them with flowers which the storms of life have no longer power to destroy. But I cannot now tell whether these thoughts have their origin in the scene itself, or in an incident that occurred the first time I visited it.

It was on the evening of the 18th of April 1843. I had been long gazing upon it, and had imagined that I was alone, when my attention was arrested by a sigh from some one near me. I turned round and saw a venerable old man seated upon a fragment of the fallen cliff, beneath which the violets were very thickly clustering. His hair

was white as silver; his face deeply furrowed, and yet pervaded by a general expression of childish simplicity, which formed a strong contrast to the lines which must have been indented upon it by care and suffering, no less than the lapse of years. I cannot recall the words of the chance observation which I addressed to him: but it related to the lateness and inclemency of the season, and I was at once struck by the singularity of his reply. "Yes, yes," he said musingly, "the winter has indeed been very long and dreary: and yet it has been gladdened, from time to time, by glimpses of the coming spring."

I now observed him more closely. There was a strangeness in his dress which first excited my suspicion, and I fancied that I could detect a restlessness in his light blue eye which spoke of a mind that had gone astray. "Old man," I said, "you seem tired; have you come from far?"

"Ah, woe is me," he replied, in the same melancholy tone as before; "I have indeed travelled a long and solitary journey; and at times I am weary, very weary; but my resting-place now must be near at hand."

"And whither, then," I asked, "are you going?"

"Home, sir, home," he replied; and while his voice lost its sadness, his face seemed to brighten and his eye grow steady at the thought; "I hope and believe that I am going home."

I now imagined that I had judged him hastily, and that the answers which I had ascribed to a wandering intellect proceeded in truth from depth of religious feeling. In

order to ascertain this, I asked: "Have you been long a traveller?"



"Fourscore and thirteen years," he replied; and observing my look of assumed wonder, he repeated a second time,

more slowly and sadly than before, " Fourscore and thirteen years."

"The home," I said, "must be very far off that requires so long a journey."

"Nay, nay, kind sir, do not speak thus," he answered: "our home is never far off; and I might perhaps have arrived at it years and years ago. But often during the early spring I stopped to gather the flowers that grew beneath my feet; and once I laid me down and fell asleep upon the way. And so more than fourscore and thirteen years have been wanted to bring me to the home which many reach in a few days. Alas! all whom I love most dearly have long since passed me on the road, and I am now left to finish my journey alone."

During this reply, I had become altogether ashamed of my former suspicion, and I now looked into the old man's face with a feeling of reverence and love. The features were unchanged; but instead of the childish expression which I had before observed, I believed them to be brightened with the heavenliness of the second childhood, while the restlessness of the light blue eye only spoke to me of an imagination which loved to wander amid the treasures of the unseen world. I purposely, however, continued the conversation under the same metaphor as before. "You have not then," I said, "been always a solitary traveller?"

"Ah, no," he replied: "for a few years a dear wife was walking step by step at my side; and there were little children, too, who were just beginning to follow us. And I was so happy then, that I sometimes forgot we were but

travellers, and fancied that I had found a home. But my wife, sir, never forgot it. She would again and again remind me that 'we must so live together in this life, that in the world to come we might have life everlasting.' They are words that I scarcely regarded at the time, but I love to repeat them now. They speak to me of meeting her again at the end of our journey."

"And have all your children left you?" I asked.

"All, all," he replied. "My wife took them with her when she went away. She stayed with me, sir, but seven years, and left me on the very day on which she came. It seems strange now that I could have lived with them day after day without a thought that they were so near their journey's end, while I should travel onward so many winters alone. It is now sixty years since they all went home, and have been waiting for me there. But, sir, I often think that the time, which has seemed so long and dreary to me, has passed away like a few short hours to them."

"And are you sure, then," I said, "that they are all gone home?" It was a thoughtless question, and I repented the words almost before they were spoken. The tears rose quickly in the old man's eyes, and his voice trembled with emotion, as he replied: "Oh, sir! do not bid me doubt it. Surely, every one of them is gone home; one, at least, of the number is undoubtedly there, and they all went away together, as though they were travelling to the same place; besides, sir, my wife was constantly speaking to them of their home; and would not their journey as well as my own have been prolonged, if their home had not been ready for

them? And when I think of them I always think of home; am I not, then, right in believing that all of them are there?"

There were allusions in this answer which I did not at the time understand; but the old man's grief was too sacred for me to intrude further upon it. I felt, also, that any words of my own would be too feeble to calm the agitation which my thoughtless observation had caused. I merely repeated a passage from Holy Scripture in reply: "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord: even so, saith the Spirit, for they rest from their labours."

The old man's face again brightened, and as he wiped away the tears, he added, "And 'Blessed,' also, 'are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.' There is not only a blessing for those who have been taken to their rest, but there is the image of that blessing to cheer the old man who is left to pursue his solitary journey."

At this moment, the sun, which had been obscured by a passing cloud, suddenly shone forth, and its rays were reflected by a path of gold in the silent waters. The old man pointed to it with a quiet smile: the change was in such harmony with his own thoughts, that I do not wonder at the metaphor it suggested to him. "There," said he, "is the blessing of the mourner! See how it shines down from the Heaven above, and gilds with its radiance the dreary sea of life!"

"True," I replied; "and the sea of life would be no longer dreary, if it were not for the passing clouds which at times keep back from it the light of Heaven." His im-

mediate answer to this observation proved the image, which he had employed, to be one long familiar to his own mind. "There are indeed clouds," he said, "but they are never in heaven; they hover very near the earth; and it is only because our sight is so dim and indistinct that they seem to be in the sky."

A silence of some minutes followed this remark. I was, in truth, anxious that the old man should pursue the metaphor farther. But the gleam of light passed away as the sun sank behind the western hills. His feelings appeared to undergo a corresponding change, and he exclaimed, hastily, "The day is fast drawing to a close, and the night must be near at hand: I must hasten onward on my journey. Come, kind sir, and I will show you where my friends are waiting for me."

I was wondering whether he now spoke metaphorically or not, when my thoughts were suddenly turned into a new channel, and my former painful suspicions returned. As the old man leant upon his staff, his wrists became exposed to view, and I saw that they were marked with deep blue lines, which could only have been caused by the galling of a chain in former years.

The poor wanderer observed the look I gave them. A sudden flush of shame overspread his countenance, and he hurriedly drew down his garment to conceal them. It was, however, but a momentary impulse; he again exposed them to my view, and he himself gazed sadly upon them as he said, "Why should I try to hide them, when they are left there to remind me constantly of my true condition? For in times

past I have borne the pressure of more wearing bonds than those; and though I have been released from them now, no



one can tell how dark and deep is the stain that they have left upon the soul." Something more he added, but his eye

was turned meekly towards heaven, and it was only from the movement of his lips that I fancied I could trace the words of the prayer, "Though we be tied and bound with the chain of our sins, yet let the pitifulness of Thy great mercy loose us."

He now began to move slowly forward. The ground was rough and uneven, and his step so very feeble, that I expected every instant to see him fall. He struck his foot against a stone, and I sprang forward to his assistance. "Thank you, kind sir," he said, in his quiet way; "but do not fear for me: my own frail limbs could not support me for an instant; but I have a staff on which I lean; and though I may stumble at times, I cannot fall."

Again I was in doubt whether to interpret his words literally or not; but my belief now was that the old man almost unconsciously used the language of allegory. Long habit had so taught him to blend together the seen and the unseen world, that he could not separate them. Life was to him a mirror, and in the passing objects of sight and sense he never failed to recognise the images of spiritual things.

CHAPTER II.

> So wanderers, ever fond and true,
> Look homeward through the evening sky,
> Without a streak of heaven's soft blue
> To aid affection's dreaming eye.
>
> CHRISTIAN YEAR.

AT the conclusion of the last chapter I gave the opinion that I formed of the old man from the brief conversation I myself had with him. The following incident cast, as it were, a shadow upon it, and robbed it of its brightness, but did not really alter it. My intercourse with him was brought to a sudden and painful conclusion. It was at my persuasion that he crossed a stile which separated the wild scenery of the landslip from the public road leading to the little village of B——. I thought it would be easier for him to walk along the more beaten track. He had yielded with apparent reluctance to my request. His unwillingness appeared to proceed from instinct rather than reason. It may in part have arisen from a kind of natural sympathy which attracted him to that wild luxuriant spot ; in part from an unconscious dread of the danger to which he actually



THE OLD MAN GAZING AT THE VILLAGE CHURCH.

became exposed. He simply said, "This smooth way was not made for the like of me, kind sir; but, under your protection, I will venture along it."

Alas! I little thought of the kind of protection he required. We had advanced but a few hundred yards, and had just reached the summit of the hill which commanded the first view of the village church. The old man had paused for a little while, and appeared to gaze upon it with a feeling of the most intense interest; I was afraid even by a passing question to interrupt the quiet current of his thoughts; when the silence was suddenly broken by the creaking of a cart-wheel, which grated harshly on my ear; and almost before I could look round, I heard a voice of rude triumph behind me, crying out, "There he is—there he is—there goes the old boy! Stop him, stop him, sir! he is mad."

I have no heart to describe the scene that followed: the poor wanderer shuffled forward with a nervous hurried step; but in a few seconds the cart was at his side; the driver immediately jumped out, and seizing him by the collar, with many a rude word and coarse jest, tried to force him to enter it. For a moment, surprise and indignation deprived me of speech, for I had begun to regard the old man with such a feeling of reverent love, that it almost seemed to me like a profanation of holy ground. When, however, he turned his eyes towards me, with an imploring look, I recovered myself sufficiently to demand by what authority he dared thus molest an inoffensive traveller on his journey. In my inmost heart I dreaded the answer I should probably receive;



THE CAPTURE.

neither was my foreboding wrong: the man laughed rudely as he replied, "He has been mad, quite mad, for more than fifty years; he escaped this morning from the Asylum, and one of the keepers has been with me all day long scouring the country in search of him."

It was in vain that I sought a pretext for disbelieving the truth of the story. I could not help feeling that it did but confirm a suspicion which, in spite of myself, had kept crossing my own mind: for the bright colouring which was shed by faith on the thoughts and words of the old man was not alone a sufficient evidence that they were under the guidance of reason. Yet, of one thing at least I felt sure, that, whatever were the state of his intellect, it could be no imaginary cause that now so strongly moved him. My heart bled for him as I listened to the pathetic earnestness with which he implored the protection that I was unable to afford. He even forgot to use the language of metaphor in the agony of his grief. "Indeed, indeed, sir," he said, "they call me mad, but do not believe them, for I am not mad now. There, there," he added, pointing towards the church, "my wife and children are waiting for me. It was on this very day that they went away, and we have now been parted sixty years. I have travelled very far to join them once again before I die. Oh, have pity upon me! I only ask for one little half-hour, that I may go on in peace to the end of my journey."

Large drops of moisture trembled on his forehead as he uttered these words; his whole face became convulsed with emotion, and he clung with such intensity to my garment,

that his rude assailant tried in vain to unloosen his grasp. The man himself was evidently frightened by the agitation which his own violence had caused, and appeared doubtful how to proceed, when the scene was fortunately interrupted by the arrival of his companion.

He was the keeper who had been sent from the Asylum with the cart, but had left it in order to search the pathway which led through the landslip. His look and manner afforded a striking contrast to those of the first comer, who proved to be merely the owner of the vehicle, which had been hired for the occasion. Immediately on his arrival, he reprimanded him for his rude treatment of the old man, and insisted on his returning to the cart, and desisting from all further interference. My hopes were greatly raised by this, and I flattered myself I should now have little difficulty in obtaining for the poor wanderer the indulgence which he sought. But I soon found my mistake, and, under the irritated feelings of the moment, almost preferred the rude conduct of the first comer to the quiet determination with which his companion listened to my request.

He merely smiled at the account I gave of my own interview with the old man; and when I suggested that it contained no evidence of insanity, shook his head, and replied, "You do not know poor Robin. His notions about home are the peculiar feature of his madness; but you are not the first person that has been deceived by them."

He spoke in a low tone, as though he was anxious not to be overheard. But the precaution seemed unnecessary: for, though the old man had mechanically retained his grasp on

my garments, he was now looking eagerly towards the village church, and I could see, from the expression of his countenance, that his thoughts had passed away from the scene around him.

When I found my arguments of no avail, I changed my ground, and besought as a favour that he would make the trial of letting the old man proceed to the end of his journey, and trust to his promise to return quietly from thence. "Sir," he replied, in a louder voice, "I should have no more hesitation in trusting the word of poor Robin than your own. He never deceived me; and, under ordinary circumstances, I would at once grant his request; but the hour is late, and, as it is, the night will close in upon us before we can get back to the town of N——. The responsibility will rest upon me if mischief should arise from any additional delay. I am sure Robin himself would not desire it." As he said this he turned towards the old man; but his countenance was unchanged, his eye still fixed upon the church, and he either had not heard the words at all, or they had failed to convey any distinct impression to his mind.

After a pause, I again renewed my entreaties, urging that it would at least be a better plan than having recourse to violence, which must eventually produce a far more serious delay. "Of course," said the attendant, "anything is better than having recourse to violence." "Then," said I, "you accede to my request?" "Only," replied he, with a provoking smile, "in case all other methods fail; but as the delay would be a real inconvenience to us, you must permit me

first to try my powers of persuasion. Let me now beg of you, whatever surprise you may feel, to be careful to express none." He again lowered his voice as he said these words, and, in spite of the dislike inspired by the self-confidence of his manner, and of other stronger emotions, my curiosity was excited to know how he would proceed. He placed himself opposite to the old man, so as to intercept his view of the village, and then, having fixed his eye calmly and steadfastly upon him, with an appearance of real interest, thus soothingly addressed him:—"I would gladly go on with you, Robin; but am sure you are under some mistake. Your wife and children cannot be in yonder village,—they are not there, they are at home. Come quietly with me now, and perhaps this evening you may go home also."

These simple words touched some hidden chord in the old man's heart, and their effect was almost magical. All other feelings passed away, and I forgot the presence of his companions, as I watched the change which they produced. His features became composed, his hand relaxed its hold, and his voice resumed its former tranquil tone as he slowly repeated: "They are not there, they are at home: they are not there, they are at home. True, very true; they are not there, they are at home."

Presently he raised his eyes to heaven, and the attendants, no less than myself, were overawed by the solemnity of his manner. There was a silence of a few seconds, during which he seemed to listen intently; and then, as though he had some echo from above, which confirmed the hope that had been held out to him, he confidently added: "And

I also shall go home,—and this very evening I shall be there."

While I was still pondering on these words, the old man had of his own accord quietly placed himself in the cart, and his companions had seated themselves by his side. They were on the point of driving off before the thought occurred to me of offering him money. I drew out my purse, half-expecting him to refuse the proffered gift; and it was with a strong feeling of disappointment that I observed the look of satisfaction, almost amounting to eagerness, with which he took the silver from my hand. I said within myself, "Can it be, then, that the taint of covetousness is to be found in a mind from which every earthly affection seems so entirely to have been withdrawn?" But I wronged him by the thought. The money was immediately taken from him, and he resigned it to another no less gladly than he had received it from me. "It will not do," said the keeper, "to let him have it himself: he will merely give it away to the first beggar he meets. He has not the slightest notion of the real value of money. It shall be laid out for his benefit; and till then it will be safe in my keeping."

My countenance may have expressed dissatisfaction at the change, though in truth I had no objection to make to it. But the old man himself interrupted me before I could reply, and said, "Do not be afraid, kind sir; whether it remain with me or him, your treasure will be safe, quite safe; it matters not now whether it remain with me or him;" and then added, in a more solemn tone, "safe 'where neither rust nor moth doth corrupt, and where

thieves do not break through and steal.' I will take it home with me; and when you also go home, you will find



it there." And I now understood how it was for my sake that he had so gladly welcomed the gift; and I thought,

too, that if in truth money had a real value at all, it must be the one which was assigned to it by him.

The men were in a hurry to depart, and I was now forced to bid adieu to the old man. He appeared so sorry to leave me, that I promised on the morrow to come and see him. I did not like to use the word asylum, so I said at his dwelling-place. The expression at once caught his ear, and re-awakened the train of thought which my gift had interrupted for a time.

"Not in my dwelling-place," he said, "for to-morrow I shall not be there. If you see me again, kind stranger, it must be at home. May God bless you, and guide you on your way!" The cart was already in motion, but he looked back once more, and waved his hand as he said, "Good-bye, sir. Remember that we all are going home."

They were the last words I heard him speak, and it is perhaps from that cause that they made so strong an impression on my mind; for often since then, when I have been tempted to wander from the right path, or to murmur as I walked along it, I have thought upon the old man's parting warning, and asked myself the question, "Am I not going home?"



CHAPTER III.

Two worlds are ours: 'tis only sin
Forbids us to descry
The mystic heaven and earth within,
Plain as the sea and sky.

CHRISTIAN YEAR.

VERY early on the following morning I proceeded on foot to the town of N——. The scenery through which I passed was rich and beautiful, but it was lost upon me at the time: for there were busy thoughts within, which would not suffer my eye to rest on any external object. I was on my way to visit the old man, and had a presentiment, almost amounting to conviction, that I should not find him alive. The words, "I also shall go home, and this very evening I shall

be there," in spite of myself, kept recurring to my mind. It was to no purpose that I endeavoured to set them aside, as part of the wanderings of a disordered intellect: there was a solemnity in the look and manner of the poor wanderer, which gave a reality to their meaning; and I believed the shadow of the future to have been resting on his spirit at the time he spoke them.

These fears gradually increased as I approached the Asylum. At the entrance there stood a little girl, weeping as though her heart would break. A woman, who appeared to be her mother, was trying in vain to comfort her. Her only reply to every caress was a fresh burst of sobs and tears. The scene was so in harmony with my own thoughts, that the very instant I saw her, I guessed the cause of her sorrow. Nor was my conjecture wrong: the child had dearly loved the old man, and wept because he was no more.

The father of this girl was the superintendent of the Asylum. He also was standing by, and offered to accompany me through the building. On the way, he proved very willing to gratify my curiosity concerning the stranger who had excited in me so singular an interest. I soon found him to be an intelligent, kind-hearted man, who had entered instinctively into the thoughts and wishes of poor Robin, and yet had failed to appreciate what I may call the religion of his character. His daily familiarity with the varied forms of insanity may in part have been the cause. He had at once regarded him as a patient labouring under a peculiar kind of mental delusion, without looking beyond. In consequence of this, there was much in our conversation



"THERE STOOD A LITTLE GIRL, WEEPING."

which grated harshly on my own feelings. I loved better to think of the old man, as I had first seen him, sitting in the midst of the picturesque scenery of the landslip, than confined within the gloomy walls of a pauper asylum. The close rooms through which we passed, the dull tones of the superintendent's voice, his conviction of poor Robin's insanity, and even the compassionate interest with which he spoke of him, all interfered with the brightness of the image which my own mind had previously formed. It would have been more in harmony with my thoughts, to have heard from the child who was weeping for him, the simple narrative of the old man's life: but, perhaps, the contrast in the colouring of the picture only brings out the more strongly its intrinsic beauty; and for this reason I will still endeavour to trace it as it was first presented to my own view.

The outline is soon drawn. Poor Robin had, for more than half a century, been an inmate of the asylum. No one could tell from whence he had been brought there, or say anything with certainty of his previous history. It was, however, generally believed that he had known better days, but that some very heavy affliction had brought on mental derangement; and that, in consequence of this, his property had gradually gone to ruin, until at length he was consigned to a pauper asylum. He had been placed there under a very different system of treatment from that which now prevails. It had even been thought necessary in the first instance to confine him with handcuffs and chains: and he would often struggle, in a paroxysm of passion, to set himself free. But after a few years, all the more violent symptoms of his dis-

order had entirely disappeared, and he became so quiet and resigned, that the physician had considered it safe to release him from his bonds, and suffer him to wander at large within the precincts of the Asylum.

"There can be no doubt of the facts, sir," continued my guide, "for the marks on poor Robin's wrists prove him to have, at one time, undergone a very rigorous confinement; and yet, when I came here, I found that he had been long in the enjoyment of comparative freedom. But it is a case that always perplexes me, when I think of it; for the general effect of harsh treatment is to render the patient more violent and intractable than before; and I cannot understand from what cause the change in poor Robin's conduct could in the first instance have arisen."

"Do you not think," I asked, "that it may have been a sign of returning reason?" He smiled at the question, as he replied, "So far from it, sir, that it was accompanied by a new and extraordinary delusion, which never afterwards entirely left him. He fancied that the bonds which he felt and saw were merely imaginary, and that there were other invisible chains which were the real cause of his confinement. They say, that from the time this idea once gained possession of his mind, he made no further effort to recover his freedom, but even thanked the attendants for the care they were taking of him, and became as gentle and submissive as a child." Then I remembered the metaphor which the old man had employed when the marks on his wrist had attracted my attention; and I said within myself, that it was not indeed the return of reason, but a brighter and a

far holier light, which had thus shone on the poor captive, and brought peace and resignation to his soul.

After his partial release, the manners and language of Robin had soon excited observation, and strengthened the belief that he must at one time have known better days. It was not, however, till the milder system of treatment was introduced generally into the Asylum, that the full beauty of his character had developed itself. Since that time, he had gradually won the affection of many of the patients, and had become an object of deep interest to all visitors. They had often come for the express purpose of talking with him. "And," continued my conductor, "I often listened with wonder to the various interpretations they put upon his answers. Some would discover in them poetry; some, philosophy; some, religion; some, I know not what, according to the previous bias of their own minds." I inquired in what light he himself was disposed to view them? "As the wanderings of insanity," he replied; "for poor Robin was, undoubtedly, mad:" but presently added more thoughtfully, "yet there was something in his peculiar kind of madness which I could never exactly fathom."

I asked, whether no friend or relative had come to inquire after the old man, during the long period of his confinement? "No one," answered my conductor; "and so far it was a mercy that he had been deprived of his reason, since his madness prevented his being aware of his own solitary condition."

"How do you mean?" I said; "surely he could not help feeling that he was alone?"

"On the contrary," he replied, "he fully believed that he had a wife and children and home, and would speak, from day to day, of going to join them. Poor fellow! at one time, those who had the care of him would argue with him, and endeavour to explain to him that he was under a delusion. And the old man would soon get confused in his reasoning, and end by wringing his hands in an agony of grief. But, since I have come here, I have thought it best to humour him in the belief; and not only forbidden all contradiction on this subject, but encouraged the attendants to talk to him about his home, and promise, that if he behaved well, he should go there very soon. You will hardly believe that I have seen tears of joy run down his cheeks at these simple words. Yet some have said that it was almost cruel to encourage a hope which must end in disappointment at last."

"But did it end in disappointment?" I said, following my own thoughts, rather than addressing my companion. He seemed struck by the remark, and, after a pause, replied, "Why, sir, one can hardly say that it did; for the hope seemed to grow stronger instead of weaker, as year after year passed by; and he continued in the same happy delusion to the very hour of his death. I have often thought that this imaginary home was a source of greater joy and comfort to him than the possession of any actual home could have been. When anything vexed or disturbed him he would say, that when at home he should feel it no more. When he felt dull and depressed, he would rouse himself by the thought, that he was going home. I myself have,

at times, felt disposed to envy him his belief: and there was something very wonderful in the influence it gave him over his companions."

I inquired how this belief could influence others. "Because," said he, "Robin was unable to separate the present from the future; and so it was part of his confusion of ideas to believe that those with whom he lived here would live with him in his home also. It is the only instance I have known of a person under the influence of insanity being able to impart his own views to his companions. But there seemed to be a kind of infection in the old man's madness; and more than one patient, who had previously been plunged in hopeless despondency, was gradually led to take interest in Robin's home. The effect has been so salutary with us, that I have often wished the same happy delusion could be introduced generally into other asylums."

I was following the deep train of reflection awakened by this rêmark, and wondering how far it might indeed be possible to graft religion on the imagination, and so to soothe and cheer the dreams of insanity with the hope of heaven, when my conductor again resumed the conversation. "There was, sir," he said, "another delusion of the old man's, scarcely less happy in its consequences than his belief about his home. You might have fancied that, from having once known better days, he would have felt bitterly the degradation of his new condition; but the whole time that he was in the Asylum he seemed utterly unconscious that he was dependent on the parish for support."

"Do you mean," I asked, "that he imagined some-

thing had been preserved from the wreck of his own property?"

"Not in the least," he replied; "he was fully aware that his own property was gone; but he believed his daily wants to be supplied by a kind of miracle, and would often observe that he had gone on for more than fifty years without making provision for the morrow, and yet had never known what it was to be without clothing or food. Of course, sir, I did everything in my power to encourage him in the belief; but one day I was greatly annoyed to find a visitor, who was not aware of the old man's peculiarities, endeavouring to explain to him that the parish was bound to find him support."

"And did he," I asked, "appear much hurt at the discovery?"

"Fortunately not, sir," he replied; "and this, I own, quite took me by surprise; for I greatly feared lest the consciousness of his dependence might destroy that feeling of self-respect, which, in all cases of insanity, it is so important to preserve. But Robin was rather pleased than vexed at the idea of the parish providing for him. Presently, however, he grew bewildered, and shook his head, and said that, after all, the parish could not provide for him beyond a single day, and that perhaps to-morrow he might be at home. The visitor was beginning to say something in reply: but Robin's home was with me sacred ground, and I would not suffer the argument to proceed farther."

Another pause of some minutes followed, until I broke it by inquiring whether the child whom I had observed at the entrance was related to the old man.

"Oh no, sir," he replied; "little Annie is my own daughter, and many persons have wondered that I suffered her to be so constantly with him. But I consider the society of children to be very beneficial to the insane; there is something in their ways and language which they can understand far better than our own; and this was peculiarly the case with poor Robin."

"And do you suppose," I said, "that the child liked to be with him?"

"Undoubtedly," he replied; "for the choice was her own. I merely encouraged it. But Robin had an inexhaustible stock of fairy tales, which made him a great favourite with children; and Annie would sit and listen to them for hours together."

"Do you really mean," I asked in some surprise, "that they were fairy tales?"

"Why, sir, for that matter," he answered, "poor Robin himself believed them to be true, and it was that which gave a peculiar interest to his manner of telling them. Some visitors have fancied them to be a kind of allegory: and I have often traced in the words a double meaning, of which the old man himself could hardly have been conscious. But, however this may have been, it is clear that they were connected with his particular mental delusion, from the way in which his imaginary home formed the prominent feature of every story."

I expressed a wish to hear one of them, and yet was hardly sorry when he confessed himself to be unable to comply with my request. He told me that he had only

heard them in detached portions, for the patients in the Asylum were too numerous to allow him to devote as much time to poor Robin as he might otherwise have done. "But, sir," he continued, "little Annie knows them all by heart, though I am afraid to-day she is feeling too deeply the loss of her companion to be able to repeat one. There certainly was something very singular in her fondness for the old man, and I have often been perplexed at the kind of influence he had over her. She herself was sometimes a sufferer from his delusions, and yet always fancied poor Robin must be in the right, and would submit to his wishes without a murmur or complaint. On one occasion, I myself felt called upon to interfere."

I begged him to relate the circumstance to which he referred.

"It was, sir," he said, "on Annie's ninth birthday, in November last. I had given her in the morning a new Victoria half-crown, and she went immediately to exhibit her treasure to her friend. She looked grave and thoughtful on her return; and, when I asked what purchases she had made with her present, she confessed that the old man had begged it of her, and she had given it him. The next day I told Robin how wrong he had been to take the poor child's money. But he answered, with his usual strangeness, that he did not in the least want it, and had asked for it because he loved little Annie, and wished to do her a kindness. Now, most people would have thought that this was rather a reason for giving her a present than for taking one away. And yet the old man spoke the truth, for he



ANNIE AND OLD ROBIN.

knew no better. It was one of his peculiarities to imagine that he was conferring a favour when he received one."

There was a passage from Holy Scripture which this answer suggested to my mind. I remembered "the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive,"[1] and I repeated it, rather to myself than to my companion. The words, however, caught his ear, and he observed that it was very likely I had hit upon the truth; for the understanding texts of Scripture in their literal meaning was one feature of poor Robin's insanity.

With a view to pursuing the subject further, I inquired whether the old man had restored the money.

"No, sir," replied my guide; "and this is the most provoking part of the story. I should not so much have minded if he had wished for it as a keepsake from the child; but he said he had lent it to some companion who had more need of it than himself. He did not even so much as remember his name. I told him he had much better have given it at once, as he had no chance of seeing it again. His own mind, however, was perfectly at rest about it, and he assured me that it was only lent, and would undoubtedly be restored, if not sooner, at least when he went home. Of course, sir, when he touched upon his home, I did not venture to press him farther. But this was another of his delusions, which, though comparatively harmless while he was staying here, must of itself have entirely unfitted him for the management of his own affairs. He would lend all that he had to his brother paupers, and, though no one

[1] Acts xx. 35.

ever thought of repaying him, was just as happy as if the things remained in his own possession."

And another passage of Holy Scripture rose to my remembrance: "He that hath pity on the poor, lendeth unto the Lord: and look, what he layeth out it shall be paid him again." And I did not wonder that, with so sure a promise, the mind of poor Robin should have been at rest.





CHAPTER IV.

Ever the richest, tenderest glow
  Sets round th' autumnal sun:
But there sight fails: no heart may know
  The bliss when life is done.

CHRISTIAN YEAR.

I HAVE reserved for a separate chapter that part of my conversation within the walls of the Asylum which led to a description of the closing scene of the old man's life. I was still reluctant to admit his insanity, for it seemed to me that he had only so fully realised the presence of the unseen world, as to have forgotten altogether the things of sight in the things of faith. I inquired, therefore, of my companion, whether any more decided symptoms of madness had ever exhibited themselves than those which he had already mentioned. He appeared surprised at the question, but replied that, though the old man was always more or less

under the influence of the disorder, there undoubtedly were certain periodic returns of it, and that these uniformly occurred at the commencement of spring.

"And did these," I asked, "render him for the time violent and intractable?"

"Oh no, sir," he answered; "ever since I have known him he has been the same quiet and inoffensive creature, and his madness used rather to assume a melancholy form. He became sad and dejected, and refused to eat, and would pass whole days together in his own solitary cell. On one occasion, my wife sent little Annie, in the hope that she might cheer him; but he would not even admit the child; he told her that his father was then with him, and that he would not talk to her. I went myself when I heard this; but, upon opening the door, I found, as I expected, that he was alone."

"Perhaps," said I, "he may have meant that he was praying to his Father in Heaven."

"It is not unlikely," he replied; "for prayer was one way in which at these seasons his madness most frequently exhibited itself. I mean," he added, observing my look of surprise, "that he did not then pray like other people, but would often remain whole hours together upon his knees."

And I remembered how the prophetess Anna was said to have served God with fastings and prayers night and day, and how our blessed Lord Himself had continued a whole night in prayer to God; but I made no further reply.

"The doctor," resumed my conductor, "considered the long solitude to be so bad for him, that for the last few days

he had not suffered him to remain in his cell. It was, perhaps, this circumstance which turned the current of his thoughts into another channel, and led to his wandering from the Asylum."

I was not sorry to change the conversation, by inquiring how he had contrived his escape.

"Nay," he replied, "it is hardly fair to speak of it as an escape. We were never very strict with the old man, and often suffered him to go beyond the boundaries. On the present occasion, he had made no secret of his intention, and told one of the attendants that he was anxious to pay his wife and children a visit, and should soon be back. I have no doubt myself that he intended to keep his word; but he probably started, in the first instance, in a wrong direction, and so lost his way."

"What do you mean," I asked, "by his starting in a wrong direction? I thought you were ignorant from what part of the island he had been brought here."

"True, sir," he replied; "but Robin himself always fancied that his home lay towards the east: the little window of the cell he occupied looked in that direction; and, though it was too cold for him in the winter months, we never could persuade him to change it for one with a southern aspect. He always said that he did not feel the cold, as long as he could see his home. Now, there is nothing but a small hamlet visible from the window, and, of course, when the old man did not return, I sent to it to inquire after him."

"And had he been there?" I said.

"No, sir," he replied; "and, after wasting many hours in the search, we at length heard that he had been seen walking along the road which led direct to the Undercliff. It was this circumstance which enabled him to get so many miles from the Asylum before he was overtaken. But, as I said, I do not think that he intentionally misled us, but only missed his way."

Now I knew full well that the village of B—— was not the home of which the old man had spoken; but, when I remembered the agony with which he had implored to be allowed to proceed thither, I could not believe that mere accident was the cause of his journey. I resolved to return thither to prosecute my inquiries; but, before I left the Asylum, asked to see the room which poor Robin had occupied.

"This is it, sir," said my conductor, as he threw open the door of a low narrow cell. "You will find it smaller and more comfortless than many others, but it is the one in which he was placed when he was first brought here; and he had become so fond of his little window, and the view towards the east, that it would have been a mistaken kindness to force him to change it."

I scarcely heard the words of apology, for I felt a sudden thrill as I found myself ushered thus unexpectedly into the chamber of death. The old man was lying upon his narrow bed, and a stream of light through the open window fell upon his tranquil countenance. A single glance was sufficient to tell me not only that he was indeed dead, but that his end had been full of peace. There was no convulsion of the features, and the first symptoms of decay had

not yet appeared. His eyes had been left unclosed, but the wandering light was no longer there, and the smile



which from time to time had been wont to play across his lips, rested quietly upon them now. The one idea that his

look and posture alike conveyed to the mind was that of perfect tranquillity and repose. I felt that his long journey had at length been finished, and that the old man was at rest in his home.

My companion also seemed for a while absorbed in thought. He advanced softly to the bedside, and it was not until, with a gentle hand, he had closed the old man's eyes, that he broke the silence by observing, "Ah, sir, morning after morning I have found him lying thus, and gazing through the open window. His sight was gradually becoming very weak from the glare of light, but he was unconscious of it himself. And it was but yesterday he told me that in a little while he should be no longer dazzled by the brightness of his home. Poor fellow! when I came into the room a few hours since, and saw his eyes so calm and motionless, though the full rays of the sun were falling upon them, I knew that he must be dead, and could not help thinking how singularly his words had come true."

There was something in the tone of voice in which this description was given, that proved the speaker to have some secret feeling of its allegorical meaning, though he himself would probably have been unable to define it.

A Bible and Prayer-Book were lying on the table by the bedside. I turned to the fly-leaf of the former, in the hope that I might at least gather from it the poor wanderer's name. There was written in it, "Susan Wakeling; the first gift of her husband, April 18th, 1776." And when I remembered the old man's great age, I conjectured that the sacred volume must formerly have been his own wedding

present to his bride. I replaced it on the table, and it opened of its own accord at the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. The page was much worn, as though it had not only been often read, but many tears had fallen upon it. My eye quickly rested on the passage, "These all died in faith; . . . . and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And, truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an Heavenly."[1] And while I read, it seemed as though I had found the text to the old man's history.

Another smaller volume was near them, which proved to be the *Christian Year*. My conductor told me that it was the gift of the chaplain. For a moment I wondered at his choice, for I knew that it contained much which poor Robin must have been unable to understand. But the hymn for Septuagesima Sunday, and many others, were marked with pencil. And as my eye glanced over them, my wonder ceased. They were all in such perfect unison with the old man's own thoughts, that, however faint may have been the image which they conveyed, they could not have failed to exercise a soothing influence on his mind.

I inquired whether the chaplain used to come often to see him. "Very frequently," was the reply. "He took great interest in poor Robin, and the old man was grateful for it. It certainly was singular," he added, thoughtfully,

[1] Hebrews xi. 13-15.

"that on his return yesterday evening, he should have expressed so earnest a wish that the chaplain should be sent for."

"And did you refuse?" I asked.

"Fortunately not, sir," he replied. "I hesitated at first, for it was very late, and poor Robin was evidently much exhausted with the fatigue and excitement of the day. But he became so anxious about it, that my wife interceded for him, and told me she thought he would go to sleep more quietly after he had been here. I well remember now the peculiar emphasis with which the old man repeated her words, and said, 'Yes, yes, I shall doubtless go to sleep more quietly after he has been here.' It almost seemed as though he felt his end to be near at hand."

I begged to know what passed at his interview with the chaplain. My companion, however, could give me no information as to the first part of it, for the old man had desired to be left alone with him, and his wish had been at once indulged. "But," he continued, "on our return to the room, we found him looking more light and cheerful than we had ever before seen him; and when I congratulated him, he said that it was no wonder, for a very heavy burthen had been taken away. The chaplain then told us that he proposed to administer to him the Holy Communion, and invited my wife and myself to partake of it with him. It is a point on which I have always felt doubtful, for persons in the state of poor Robin must have very indistinct views of the real nature of a sacrament. In this case the old man's own expression proved it; for, as he joined in the chaplain's request, he told us that he was going on a long

journey; and might require the food to support him on the way."

"Nay," I could not help observing, "surely his journey lay through the valley of the shadow of death, and he meant that his soul would be refreshed on its passage by the Body and Blood of Christ, even as the body is by bread and wine."

My companion shook his head as he replied, "I believe, sir, Robin used the words literally, but the chaplain took the same view of them with yourself, and it was a point for him and not me to decide. Certainly nothing could be more grave or attentive than the old man's manner during the whole ceremony. And it may be that some glimmering of returning reason was sent to prepare him for the approach of death. Such cases are not of uncommon occurrence."

I could not help thinking that, in spiritual things, poor Robin had not needed its light; but I made no further reply; and my companion resumed his narrative:

"When the service was over, the old man merely squeezed the chaplain's hand in parting, but did not speak to him. I also soon afterwards went away, but my wife stayed for some time longer watching by his bedside. He remained perfectly still and silent, though his eyes were open. At length she asked him whether he did not feel tired, and wished to go to sleep? And she tells me, that he smiled like a little infant, as he replied, 'Oh no, not at all tired; for all that wearied me has been taken away.' And then, after a pause, he added, 'But you may wish me good-night now for I shall be asleep very soon;—and tell

dear Annie I am going home.' He spoke in so cheerful a tone, that my wife little thought they were his last words, and she left him, as she fancied, to repose. But it was a sleep from which he never woke again. Ah, sir," he continued, "it seems a sad thing to die thus forsaken and alone; and yet, after all, many who have kind friends and relatives round their sick-beds might envy poor Robin his peaceful end. He went off so quietly at last, that those who slept in the room adjoining were not disturbed during the night by the slightest sound. But early this morning, when I came to inquire after him, he was lying just as you now see him, quite dead!"

The deep feeling with which these words were pronounced, convinced me that he was no less touched than myself by the contemplation of the outward tranquillity of the old man's death. But who can realise the inward peace that must have been there, when the body fell asleep, and the soul was released from its long imprisonment, and carried by angels on its Homeward journey!

As we left the old man's room, I inquired whether there were many besides little Annie who mourned his loss. A smile again crossed the features of my companion, as he replied:

"There were many of the patients who loved him almost as dearly as the child herself, but I can scarcely speak of them as mourners now. A report spread among them this morning that Robin was going home; I cannot tell from what quarter it arose, but when I came to them, they crowded round me to know if it were true."

"And did you," I asked, "then tell them that he was dead?"

"Not in so many words," he replied. "I merely said that he was already gone home, and that they must not expect to see him here again. And more than one voice exclaimed in reply, 'Happy, happy Robin, to be taken home!'"

Still I observed that I had remarked on the countenance of many of the patients an expression of sadness.

"True," he answered, "for with them the transition of feeling from joy to grief is very rapid. They are not, however, sorrowing for poor Robin, but for themselves, because they have not been allowed to accompany him. There were some, in the first instance, who were very loud in their complaints; but I soothed them by saying that it was right the old man should go first, because he had been here so long." After a pause, he continued: "It is my own wish, as well as the chaplain's, that many of them should attend the funeral, for I would gladly pay this tribute of respect to Robin's memory. And yet I am half reluctant to give way to it: the remembrance of the scene might afterwards throw some gloom over the bright and happy notions which they have now formed of his home."

I replied that it might be so; "and yet," I added, "they would find in the thanksgivings and prayers of the Burial Service only the exact echo of their own joy and sorrow." And as I said this, I could not help feeling that the scene after the old man's death had been in perfect harmony with his life, and that poor Robin was rightly rejoiced over and rightly mourned.

My account of my visit to the Asylum has already far exceeded the limits which I had assigned it. And yet, at the risk of being wearisome, I cannot refrain from adding one more fragment from my conversation within its walls, before I proceed to the more pleasant task that lies beyond. With a view to prosecuting my inquiries in the village of B——, I asked my companion whether Robin had ever dropped a hint of his former calling.

"Oh yes, sir," was the reply; "he used to say that he had enlisted as a soldier very early in life, and had at one time been made a prisoner. I have seen the tears run down little Annie's cheeks at the piteous tale he would tell of the way in which his enemies had bound him hand and foot, and cast him into a dark and terrible dungeon, from which he had hardly escaped with his life. But I believe the whole story to have been imaginary, and it is one that I have little difficulty in accounting for. He doubtless referred to the hardships he had endured at the period of his first imprisonment in the Asylum. No one can wonder that they should have taken so strong a hold on his imagination."

"Did he, then," I asked, "believe that his warfare had long been at an end?"

"No, sir," he replied. "And perhaps it would be more correct to say that the treatment to which he had been exposed was the origin of his delusion, than that it accounted for it. The idea that he was liable to the attacks of some secret enemy seems from that time to have taken a fixed possession of his brain; and if any one assured him that he

never could be subjected to the same ill-usage again, his invariable answer was, that there was no safety for him except at home. And then he would maintain that having once enlisted, he could never cease to be a soldier, and talk of treacherous foes and long watchings and doubtful conflicts. You would have imagined him, from his conversation, to have been one who was fighting and struggling all day long, instead of the quiet, inoffensive character that he really was. But this, sir, was not all; he would fancy that every one else was a soldier also. He almost persuaded little Annie that she had enlisted in the same army with himself; and often made her sad by talking of the enemies who surrounded her, and the service she was required to perform."

I here interrupted him by asking whether the child had not been baptized. He at once perceived the drift of the question, and replied, "I know what you mean, sir,—she was then made the soldier and servant of Christ."

"Yes," I added, "and entered into a solemn engagement to fight manfully under His banner, against sin, the world, and the Devil."

"True," he answered; "and it is very curious that it was the old man himself who first pointed out that passage in the Prayer-Book to me. I remember it struck me at the time that his peculiar notions about soldiers might, in some way, be connected with it. And I think it far from improbable; for Robin's madness seemed principally to consist in his regarding metaphors as realities, and realities as metaphors. The difference between him and ourselves

would be, that he believed little Annie to be really a soldier, and not merely to be called one in the Prayer-Book."

I made no further reply, for my own thoughts grew perplexed, as I tried to determine with myself what were truth and realities, and what merely shadows and metaphors of the things pertaining to our present existence.



CHAPTER V.

> Oh, bliss of childlike innocence, and love
> Tried to old age !—creative power to win
> And raise new worlds, where happy fancies rove,
> Forgetting quite this grosser world of sin.
>
> CHRISTIAN YEAR.

THE rooms of the Asylum were hot and close, and as the outer door opened, it was very pleasant to escape from them into the fresh, open air. While we did so, my mind experienced a similar kind of relief, as the plaintive accents of childhood broke in on my prolonged conversation with the superintendent.

In spite of the interest I took in his narrative itself, it was with a feeling of oppression that I had listened to it; and there was something very refreshing in the sudden change. The sounds which I now heard proceeded from little Annie. She was standing on the threshold, just as I had seen her when I entered, except that her grief was of a less quiet character than before, and something of impatience seemed to be mingled with it.

"It is of no use," said her mother, as we approached; "the poor child will fret herself into a fever, and I cannot

persuade her to come away. She does nothing but beg and entreat to be allowed to see poor Robin again. I really believe it will be the best way to take her to his cell."

"It must not be," replied her husband; "she has no idea of what death really is; and the sight of the body would fill her mind with strange fancies, and perhaps do her serious harm; for she herself is but a poor weakly thing. You know I never refused her permission to visit him while he was alive, but I cannot suffer it now. It is singular," he added, turning to me with a look of vexation, "that I should have found less difficulty in quieting the complaints of all the mourners for poor Robin within the Asylum than in soothing the grief of my own little girl. I do not like to treat her with severity, and yet without it I see no hope of getting her away."

All that I had heard of the child inspired me with a lively compassion for her; and I asked to be allowed to try my powers of persuasion. Permission was readily granted; and I instinctively had recourse to the old man's last message, as the easiest way of gaining access to her heart. "Annie," I said gently, "do you know where your friend is gone?" The simple question checked her sobs, and she looked timidly in my face, but made no reply. "Poor Annie!" I continued: "and did he indeed leave you without telling you whither he was going?"

"Home, sir, home!" she replied; and the accent, no less than the words, recalled to my mind the childlike old man: "he often told me that he was going home."

"True," I replied; "and he is gone home now. Do



"AND IF YOU DO SEE HIM AGAIN, ANNIE, WHERE WILL IT BE?"

you really wish to see him again?" She was silent; but the look of affection that beamed on every feature was a sufficient answer; so I continued: "And if you do see him again, Annie, where will it be?" Her voice faltered, as she repeated the words, "At home;" and she again burst into tears.

"Yes, Annie," I said, after a short pause, "you cannot see him here, because he is gone away. He is now happy in the enjoyment of his home, and you must wait till you can go to him there. But, perhaps, your home is different from his. Is it so, Annie?"

"Oh no," she answered, with unexpected earnestness; "we are all children of the same Father, and all travel to the same Home—that is," she added, looking down, and colouring deeply, "if we are careful to keep in the path that leads to it."

"And what path is that, Annie?"

"The path of trustful obedience, and quiet faith, and holy love," was her immediate reply.

I knew at once that the words were not her own, but that she spoke from memory, and that I had accidentally led her to one of the old man's allegories. I was anxious for my own sake to hear more of it, and it seemed to me that it might be good for her own sorrow to turn her thoughts for a little while into this channel: so I continued: "And is it a pleasant path, Annie, that leads us home?"

"It is an up-hill path," she said; "but as we walk along it, we can, if we will, awake soft notes of music beneath our feet, and there are whispering winds to cheer us on our way."

"And what, Annie," I asked, "do you mean by the soft music and the whispering wind?"

"The soft music is prayer," she replied, "and the whispering wind, the Holy Spirit of God."

"And can we," I said, "have the soft music without the whispering wind? I mean, can we pray without the assistance of God's Holy Spirit?" But there was no need for me to have explained the question; the language of allegory was most familiar to the mind of the child, and she had recourse to it in her reply.

"No, sir," she said, "for the spirit of harmony dwells in the breeze; and it is the wind alone that gives life to the music, and bears it upward from earth to Heaven."

I cannot tell how far she realised the deep meaning of these words, for I did not venture to examine her upon them. I was afraid lest I should only render indistinct the image which they conveyed to her mind, by touching the colours with an unskilful hand.

Presently I resumed: "It must, Annie, I think, be a pleasant path along which the wind thus murmurs, and the music plays!"

"It is a pleasant path," she replied, "and yet it is very thickly covered with thorns. But," she added, and from the smile which for a moment lit up her countenance, it seemed as though this were the metaphor which pleased her best, "they are all magic thorns; and if we look upward to the clear, blue sky, and tread firmly upon them, they keep changing into flowers."

"And is there not another path," I said, venturing to

guess at the conclusion of the allegory, "which leads away from home, and along which the flowers, as you tread upon them, keep changing into thorns?"

But I was wrong in my conjecture, for she looked perplexed, and replied, "I do not know, sir, about the other paths; the old man never used to talk to me but of one." And I felt ashamed of my question, as I said within myself, "Oh, happy child, to know as yet but one path; and happy teacher, to have so shared the innocency of childhood as to have spoken to her but of one!"

Presently, however, she continued, as though she observed my confusion: "But, sir, he said there were flowers which grow by the wayside. When the wind blows softly upon them they perfume the air; and their fragrance is very sweet and pleasant to those who pass them by; but if we stop to gather them, then they become magic flowers, and keep changing into thorns. And do you know, sir, why it is so?"

"Not exactly," I replied; "I should like you to explain it to me."

"Because, sir," she said, "when we gather them, we stoop down, and turn our eyes towards the earth, instead of gazing upward on the clear blue sky."

"But, Annie," I observed, "you have not yet told me what are the flowers which we gather, or the thorns on which we tread."

"The thorns," she replied, "are the trials and afflictions which God sends us; the flowers are the pleasures and amusements which we make choice of for ourselves."

"Then, Annie," I said, "the children who gather the

magic flowers are those who follow their own will; while those who tread upon the magic thorns are such as submit themselves quietly to the will of God."

Her countenance became grave, and I saw that she already guessed my meaning. I thought her mind was now sufficiently prepared to allow me to apply directly to her own case the old man's allegory; and it seemed as though his spirit were resting upon me while I did so, and I used almost unconsciously the language of metaphor.

"Annie," I continued, "a very sharp and piercing thorn was but yesterday placed in your path. Your foot is young and tender, and I do not wonder that you should shrink from treading upon it." She trembled violently at this direct allusion to her grief, and yet looked anxiously in my face, as though she wished me to say more. My own voice began to falter, and I could only add, "But, believe me, your kind friend did not deceive you; the thorn of affliction lies on the path homewards; and if you have but courage to walk quietly on, there is none that with greater certainty will change into a flower. Go, Annie, and awaken the soft music, and you will be cheered by the whispering wind."

One by one the tears trickled down her cheek, as she turned to her mother, and said, "Forgive me for my impatience; I am ready now, dearest mother, to accompany you home; or I will go home directly myself, and you shall follow me."

She did not trust herself to pause an instant, or make any further reply, but expressed her gratitude to me by a look, and at once hastened away: and while she went, so

vivid was the impression which the allegory had made on my own mind, that the wind which played with her garments seemed to possess some holy charm, and I could fancy that I was listening to strains of music, in the soft echo of her receding steps.

The mother also was silent; but there was no mistaking the expression of her countenance. The subdued smile on her lips, and the bright tears that trembled in her eyes, as she raised them to Heaven, told me that she was following the same solemn train of thought with myself, and treasuring yet more deeply in her heart the sayings of her child.

There was a pause of some seconds, and the sound of little Annie's footsteps had just died away, when the stillness was again broken by her father's voice. "You were fortunate, sir," he said, "in leading her to the story of the homeward path; many visitors have considered it the most beautiful of all that the old man told. It was a great favourite with the child. I have often heard her repeating detached portions of it to herself, though I was not aware that she had found in them so deep a meaning. It is strange, very strange," he added thoughtfully, "for I cannot even now tell who could have explained them to her." I also have often looked back with wonder on the answers of the child. But there is a passage from Holy Scripture, which seems to be their best interpreter, and they never fail to recall it to my mind: "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes."[1]

[1] St. Luke x. 21.

Poor Annie! My conversation with her gave a ray of brightness to a visit which otherwise had in it enough of gloom. Nor has this feeling been in any way changed by the early death of the child. There is still peace and joy in every thought connected with her, though within a few months of my first visit to the Asylum little Annie was laid in her quiet grave. She laboured but one short hour in the vineyard, and then was taken to the same home with the old man who had borne so long and so patiently all the burthen and heat of the day. Yet my own heart was a witness that even her little hour of labour had not been without its fruit.

A romantic story was told concerning the cause of her death. It was said that she had never recovered the loss of her friend, but gradually pined away in consequence of it, and at length died of a broken heart. But I believed not the tale; for little Annie did not sorrow as those without hope; and though, perhaps the cord of affection, that united her so closely to the old man, may have hastened her progress to the home to which he was gone, I do not think that her bereavement was the cause of her death. I had left her with the impression that she was not long for this world. I cannot exactly describe from whence this feeling arose. It was not merely because her cheek was wan, and her complexion delicate, and her little heart seemed to beat with too eager emotion for the frail prison in which it was confined; but there was something in her voice, look, and manner which kept reminding me of the world of spirits; as though, in all her youth and innocence, she were walking

on its very borders, and her gentle form might at any moment fade into the mist and vanish from my view.

The more I reflected on this, the more sure I became that little Annie had lived her time, and that no sudden shock had broken prematurely the thread of life. I thought that this assurance might afford some comfort to her parents in their heavy affliction; for Annie was an only daughter. But when I called upon them, the mother alone was at home; and I soon found that she needed no consolation which I could afford her. She had her own secret store of treasure in every word that had fallen from her darling child. I shall never forget the look with which she said to me, "Ah, sir, I understood very little of her words while she was alive; but the moment she was gone, it seemed as though a light were shining upon them from another world, and I can read them plainly now." And then, after a pause, she added, "Do you remember, sir, on the very day you were with us, how she said, 'I will go home directly myself, and you shall follow me'?" I remembered it well; and she saw from my countenance that I guessed her meaning. "Yes," she continued, as in spite of every effort to suppress it, the big tear rolled down her cheek, "it was in order that her father and myself might learn to follow her, that little Annie was taken Home. He, too, sir, has become since then an altered man."

A silent pressure of the hand was my only reply, for I felt that the afflicted mother had learnt more truly than I could teach her the lesson which was to be gathered from the death of her child.



CHAPTER VI.

Gently along the vale of tears
  Lead me from Tabor's sunbright steep ;
Let me not grudge a few short years
  With thee toward heaven to walk and weep.

But, oh ! most happy, should thy call,
  Thy welcome call, at last be given—
"Come, where thou long hast stored thy all !
  Come, see thy place prepared in heaven !"

CHRISTIAN YEAR.

THE recollection of little Annie has made me wander from my story, and I must now hasten to bring it to a conclusion. I left the Asylum, pondering deeply on the things I had heard and seen. My heart was sad within me ; for I could not help giving way to a feeling of compassionate sorrow as I thought of the old man's solitary lot.

His past history seemed, indeed, to be lost in almost

hopeless oblivion. But I knew that he must have been crushed and broken down by some terrible calamity in early youth; that he had been awakened from the stupor which it produced to the stern reality of bonds and chains, and then been doomed to a dull unvaried captivity, not for days, weeks, or months, but for a long period of more than fifty years. Thus Reason kept drawing a melancholy picture of one without home, without friends, dependent on charity for his daily bread, whose whole existence was a dreary void, with no employment to beguile his thoughts, no hope to cheer him on his way. It needed only the recollection of that peculiar solitude of mind, which is almost the certain offspring of insanity, to complete its gloom.

And yet, after all, it was my own infirmity which made me sad; for, when I had strength to gaze on the same picture with the eye of faith, bright and beautiful were the images that I saw. I then perceived that he was not without home, for his home was in the land of spirits beyond the grave; he was not without friends, for his wife and children were waiting for him there; while he remained upon earth, he was not dependent, for he felt his daily wants to be supplied by a Father's care; he never, for a single instant, was without occupation, for he had a long warfare to accomplish, a distant journey to perform; and still less was he uncheered by the blessing of hope, for he was able to rest in humble trust on his Saviour's promise, and go on, day after day, laying up treasures for himself, which neither moth nor rust could corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal. Out of the loneliness caused by his affliction he had

created a new world for himself, or rather, he had been drawn by it to live in that world which, though unseen, God has really created for us all. And surely to him life could never have been dull and unvaried, while he was able to trace the types and emblems of spiritual things alike in the passing gleams of sunshine and in the dark shadows that rested upon his path!

Mingled with these conflicting emotions, the question from time to time arose in my mind, "And was poor Robin really mad?" And again it was only my own infirmity which caused me to shrink from the reply. It is hard indeed to define madness; and the state of his intellect probably varied from time to time. Thus it may have been almost without a cloud when little Annie was his companion. So also, during my brief interview with him, the stillness of the evening, and the unison of his own thoughts with the surrounding scene, may have breathed a soothing influence upon his mind. And yet when I reflected calmly on that very interview, I felt that they were right in not suffering the old man to travel alone along the journey of life.

His was the second childhood; simple, pure, and holy as the first, and yet, in his case, no less than the first, requiring a protector's care. He spoke and thought as a child, and children could understand him; but the calm mirror of his mind quickly grew troubled in his intercourse with men, and he then lost the power of explaining his thoughts, or perhaps of himself distinguishing between the shadow and the substance, the things of sight and the things of faith. Reason had resigned her sway during the

mental conflict which had been caused by his calamities; and though peace and quietness had been restored, she never had attained sufficient vigour to resume it again. Nay, more; it may be that her lamp was the more dim and uncertain, on account of the brighter and clearer light which from that time burned unceasingly in his soul. It is possible that he was slow in observing the different shades of colour that passed across earthly objects, because to his eye one unfading colour was resting upon them all; and that his mere intellectual faculties remained weak and palsied, because out of this very weakness he had been made strong, and he was at all times conscious of the presence of a surer support and safer guide.

And what matters it, if it were so? Why may we not revere poor Robin, and love him, and learn from him, and yet not shrink from acknowledging that his reason had gone astray? Surely, there is no one who would not gladly leave the hard dull road of life, if only they could wander with him along the same bright and happy paths! There is no one who would not give the choicest gifts of reason twice told, if only they could purchase for them the childlike faith of that simple-hearted man.

I was half sorry when my arrival at the village of B—— made me change these silent meditations for the attempt to investigate the old man's connections and history. It was not, however, mere curiosity that prompted me to do so. I was anxious, if it were possible, to save him from a pauper's grave. For a long time my inquiries were in vain. Some few, indeed, had heard of poor Robin; for his fame, as

I have said, had spread beyond the walls of the Asylum; but the name of Wakeling was unknown to them; and they did not believe he had ever been connected with the parish of B——. They referred me, however, to the cottage of the oldest inhabitant of the village. She was a widow, of very great age, having lived to see four generations around her. A few years since, they said she was able to speak distinctly of events that had happened more than half a century ago, but latterly her memory had become impaired.

When I mentioned to her the name of Wakeling, the word at once awakened some recollection of the past. She twice repeated it, and added, almost mechanically, "Good and excellent people, sir, and very kind to the poor." But when I questioned her as to their occupation and history, and asked what had become of them, she shook her head, as though the thread of memory had been broken off, and she was unable to unite it again.

As a last hope, I referred directly to the spring of 1783, and inquired whether it had been marked by any particular occurrence. "Ah, sir," she replied, "much of the past is now like a dream to me, but that is a period which I never can forget." The tone of sadness in which these words were uttered, proved some deep sorrow to be connected with the remembrance of it; and on further questioning, I learnt that it was a season in which an infectious fever had raged in the village, and that whole families had been carried off by its ravages; she herself had been left an orphan. But though her recollection of the illness itself seemed as vivid as though it had occurred but yesterday, of the

Wakelings she could say nothing with distinctness. It may be that her mind was too absorbed with the remem-



brance of her own grief to allow her to recur to that of others; or it may be that, even at the time, in the general affliction the loss of an individual, however grievous, had

been scarcely noticed, and soon forgotten. At length she seemed to grow weary of my importunity, and said, "I cannot tell who may have lived, and who may have died; you must go, sir, to the churchyard, and there you will find the only certain history of that fatal spring."

A new thought was suggested by these words, and I repaired thither in the hope that I might find that information, which I had sought in vain from the living, among the silent records of the dead.

The evening was now drawing on, and it was in truth the very hour at which but yesterday I had parted from the old man. I was alone; and as I trod, with a cautious reverence, upon the green sod, there was no sound to break the tranquillity of the scene, save the ripple of the waters at the edge of the cliff on which the churchyard stood. Their restless motion only made me feel the more deeply the stillness of the hallowed ground itself; and I thought, that if the old man had been with me, he might have found in it an apt emblem of the quiet resting-place of the dead, lying on the very borders of the sea of life, and yet untroubled by its murmuring, and sheltered from its storms.

I was not long in discovering the object which I sought. The rays of the setting sun at once directed me to a stone at the eastern extremity of the churchyard. It was distinguished from those around by a simple cross; but in spite of the soft light that was now shed upon it, it was with difficulty that I deciphered the inscription which it bore. For not only was the tomb itself thickly covered with moss and weeds, but my own eye grew dim with tears, as one by

one the few sad words revealed to me the secret of the old man's history. His restlessness during the spring, the object of his last solitary journey, and parts of his conversation with myself, which before had seemed obscure, were now fully explained. The inscription was as follows:

Sacred

TO THE MEMORY OF
SUSAN, WIFE OF ROBERT WAKELING,
WHO DIED
APRIL 18, 1783, AGED 28 YEARS.
ALSO OF THEIR CHILDREN,
ALICE, AGED 6 YEARS, HENRY, AGED 5 YEARS,
AND EDWARD, AN INFANT,
WHO SURVIVED HER ONLY A FEW DAYS.

"I SHALL GO TO THEM,
BUT THEY SHALL NOT RETURN TO ME."
2 SAM. XII. 23.

There was room beneath the text from Holy Scripture for one name more, and it was there that I added the words:

ALSO OF ROBERT WAKELING,
WHO DIED
APRIL 18, 1843, AGED 93 YEARS.

They remain as a simple record that the old man was indeed united at last, in body as well as spirit, to those whom he had so dearly loved and mourned so long.

THE KING'S MESSENGERS.

'*Lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven.*'

ST. MATTHEW vi. 20



MEGACLES ERECTING HIS TOWER (SEE P. 242).

ADVERTISEMENT.

The following tale differs, in some respects, both in design and character, from the preceding Allegories by the same author. It is not intended to give a general view of our state as Christians, but merely to bring forward, prominently and distinctly, a single Christian duty. In consequence of this, it involves very little of doctrinal teaching, while the allegorical meaning lies so completely on the surface, that the youngest child cannot fail to apprehend it. For both these reasons, any *explanatory* conversations have been considered unnecessary. But a conversation of a different character has been annexed, in order to obviate the misconstruction to which the dwelling on any one duty to the exclusion of others is always liable, and, at the same time, to apply and illustrate the truths conveyed in the story.

INTRODUCTION.

"HAS any one called during my absence?" inquired Mr. Mertoun of his nephew, Leonard, on returning home after his usual round of parochial visits.

"No one," replied the boy; "I have been with Mary in the garden, and if they had, I could not have helped seeing them."

"It is strange," said Mr. Mertoun; "are you quite sure there has been no one?"

"Quite sure," he answered, but presently added, correcting himself, "at least, no one of any consequence—only some poor man."

The tone in which the last words were uttered, no less than the answer itself, grated harshly on Mr. Mertoun's ear. "*Only some poor man!*" he repeated; "why, Leonard, do you say *only?* Might not *his* visit be of consequence?"

The boy looked confused, but endeavoured to justify his former reply by saying, "Of consequence to himself, uncle, but I meant of no consequence to you."

"Nay, my dear boy;" replied Mr. Mertoun, "you now speak even more thoughtlessly than before. It could not

have been the one without being the other also. Remember, that it can never be of more importance for the poor man to declare his wants than it is for those who have the means to relieve them. Do you think you understand me?"

"I believe, uncle, I do," he replied, thoughtfully. "You mean, as you told us on Sunday, that 'it is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Mr. Mertoun perceived from the reply, that he had awakened the train of reflection which he wished, and did not, at the time, pursue the conversation. But the words, "*only some poor man*," kept recurring painfully to his own mind. His nephew and niece had been with him but a few days, yet it was not the first time he had observed in them a want of sympathy for the poor. This was, perhaps, an almost necessary result of their having been brought up in London. No opportunities had been there afforded them of visiting the poor in their own homes. They had learned to look upon all beggars as impostors, and drew no distinction between real and pretended cases of distress. Thus, though in other respects they were loving and obedient children, and well grounded in the principles of the Christian faith, the numerous warnings in the Gospel concerning the danger of wealth, and its only safeguard, remained to them almost a dead letter.

It was with a view of remedying this defect, and bringing distinctly before them the important office assigned to the poor by our Blessed Lord, that on the evening of the above conversation their uncle told them the following story:—



CHAPTER I.

Largely Thou givest, gracious Lord,
Largely Thy gifts should be restored ;
Freely Thou givest, and Thy word
Is "Freely give."
He only who forgets to hoard
Has learn'd to live.

CHRISTIAN YEAR.

THE city of Metœcia lay to the west of the dominions of a Great King. It was an ancient city, and had gradually become very large and populous. But the original settlers had been placed there in consequence of a rebellion against the King's authority; and a remarkable law continued to prevail among their descendants as a memorial of their crime. No one was allowed to remain in it above a certain number of years, and no one, when he left it, was permitted to take any portion of his property with him. This was called the law of Exile. The Great King had himself enacted it, and the citizens had no resource but submission. There was not even a fixed and definite period allotted for their stay. They were liable at any moment to receive the Royal Mandate. It came to them also one by one. As

each was summoned to depart, his dearest friends could only accompany him as far as the gates of the city. And he was then stripped of all his possessions, and sent forth as an exile on his solitary journey.

Now, as the inhabitants of Metœcia were principally merchants, one would have imagined that such a law must have proved a source of perpetual disquietude and alarm. Yet this was not the case. Occasionally, indeed, when it was enforced against a very rich man, it would awaken sad thoughts in his companions, and cause them to mourn over the uncertainty of their wealth. But, for the most part, they all lived on in a false security. Every one fancied his possessions to be as really his own as though he had been able to retain them at will. Such a delusion may appear unaccountable; but we must remember that they had gradually become accustomed to the law, and for that reason it was lightly regarded by them or altogether forgotten.

The Great King, however, was full of compassion, and took much thought for the poor exiles, who were thus careless of themselves. He knew how dark and dreary was the wilderness that surrounded the city, and was unwilling that any should be left there to perish. He did not, indeed, reverse his original decree, but he did far more than this. He changed it from a punishment into a blessing. He offered to receive the exiles into a better and more glorious City than that from which he took them. If they rejected this offer the fault was their own. All the conditions on which it was made were very easy, and the King himself



had promised to enable the citizens to perform them. But we need not dwell upon them all, for one alone, which applied more especially to the wealthier merchants, is brought before us by the present story.

In the city of Metœcia dwelt four brothers, Philargyr, Megacles, Euprepes, and Sophron. At the period at which I commence their history, the sentence of exile had lately been pronounced against their father. He had been a merchant of enormous wealth, and as, in accordance with the law, he was allowed to take nothing for his own wants, the whole of his vast possessions had fallen into the hands of his children. They had met in order to divide them. The room in which they assembled for this purpose was filled with the most costly furniture. The floor was covered with cloth of gold, which was now partially concealed by bales of yet more valuable merchandise, and heaps of precious stones, which had been placed there to await the choice of the brothers. Two sides of the apartment were hung with the most gorgeous tapestry, on the third was a window commanding an extensive view towards the west, while the wall opposite to the window was entirely covered by a spacious mirror, which reflected the various objects in the room itself and the street beyond.

But, in the midst of all this external splendour, a cloud sate on the countenance of each of the brothers. The departure of their father was too recent to allow them to forget the transitory character of the treasures which they were about to share. Let a few years pass, and each in his turn would be compelled to leave them, and go forth without

money, without home, and without friends, into the dreary desert that lay around the city.

It was these thoughts which rendered them sad. They had never before felt the full burthen of the law of Exile; they had been aware of its existence, for no citizen could be ignorant of it; but hitherto they had seen it, as it were, in the distance. It now seemed to meet them directly in their own path, and to force itself on their attention; so that the eldest brother did but echo the feelings of the rest when he said, "Of what profit is this enormous wealth? In the day of our banishment it will not purchase for us the delay of a single hour. How gladly would I barter the whole of it for some quiet dwelling-place where we might remain in security for ever!"

He had not yet finished speaking, when his eyes were attracted by the mirror, which I have described as covering one side of the room. Some image appeared to be moving across it, which was not visible in the apartment itself. He pointed it out to his brothers, and it was clear from their anxious looks that they beheld it also. It was as the form of an old man. There was nothing in his appearance to excite terror, but every object as seen in the mirror was changed by his presence. His foot trod on the cloth of gold, and it became mouldering and worm-eaten: the hem of his garment swept against a table of solid ivory, and it fell crumbling into dust: while the bales of merchandise and precious stones lost their richness and splendour, as his cold eye rested upon them.

The brothers watched these signs with a sensation of

chilling fear, and the eldest already repented his hasty words. For, in truth, in his inmost heart, he deeply loved the glittering wealth, and he was afraid, lest the mysterious stranger might take it away, and give him in its stead the quiet dwelling for which he had asked.

At length it seemed to them that the image of the old man thus addressed them :—"Children, your wish is vain. You must not speak of bartering these treasures for a lasting home. They are not really yours; they belong to the Great King, whose subjects you are. Restore them to him now, and he will keep them for you, and in the day of your exile give them to you again. In this city they are worthless. See how even my slightest touch here causes them to decay. But in the King's Palace they become incorruptible. I have no power over them there."

The brothers were yet more troubled at his words. They knew well that all the riches of Metœcia belonged to the Great King; but they were disquieted at the thought of restoring them to him again. A vague fear arose that the sentence of exile was about to be passed against themselves; and all, in some degree, shared the apprehensions of Philargyr. The old man appeared to read their thoughts, and thus replied to them :—

"Fear not; I am not now come to deprive you of your wealth. Hereafter, indeed, I shall return with the Royal Mandate, but in that hour you will both see and feel that I am near. To-day my voice comes to you from a distance, and it is but my reflected image that you behold. Yet I bear you a message from the Great King. You have wished

to purchase for yourselves a lasting home; I have said that you cannot purchase it, because your riches are not your own; they belong to the Great King. You must trust them



freely to his Messengers, without asking for a return; and he will store them up for you in his own palace, and, when you are driven from hence, will suffer you to dwell with his children in a Glorious City where the law of Exile is un-

known. But beware lest you neglect this warning, and defraud the Great King of the riches committed to your trust; for if you refuse to give them to his Messengers, and either hoard them up or spend them on yourselves, you will have no treasure laid up for you in the Royal Palace, and the gates of the Glorious City will be closed against you for ever."

Now, there was nothing really new to the merchants in the old man's warning. The royal offers of pardon, and the dangers of the neglect of them, were well known in the city. But the inhabitants seldom spoke of them to one another, because they loved their riches, and were unwilling to render obedience to the King's commands. The brothers had hitherto shared in the general feeling; and it was, perhaps, only because the remembrance of their father's departure was weighing heavily upon them that they had so long listened to the voice which now addressed them. It did not, indeed, seem to pass through their ears at all, but to fall at once inwardly on their hearts, and for the present they could not help regarding it. Yet all shrank from asking in what way they were to send their treasures to the Royal Palace. They were not, however, left in doubt. The reflection of the street in which their house stood was, as I have said, visible in the mirror. The figure of the old man now pointed towards it; and as he did so the young merchants heard distinctly the words: "Behold the Messengers of the Great King!"

They followed the direction of his finger, and it seemed to them that the approach to their luxurious dwelling was

now crowded with every form of disease and want. The poor, the maimed, and the blind were there. Men who seemed stimulated to madness by famine, and little infants who could scarce crawl upon the ground, formed part of the same vast concourse. Still, as the old man pointed, their numbers went on increasing, in every direction, until, as far as the eye could reach, every sign of wealth and luxury had disappeared, and in their stead was one universal scene of misery. Presently the shrieks of the dying, the cries of orphans, and the wailing of widows, rose in the air; and then, out of the tumult, the low solemn voice of the old man fell once more on the hearts of the brothers.

"These," he said, "and such as these, are the Messengers of the Great King. Numerous as they are, they will come to you in secret and one by one. Trust them with your treasure, and it will be safe; they will bear it for you to the Royal Palace. The journey thither is long and dangerous; but if you are sincere in your wish to send it, the Great King will not suffer it to be lost. Only do not cause them to linger needlessly within the city walls; and let their departure be secret, lest the King's enemies should impede them on their way."

The form of the old man gradually disappeared as he ceased speaking, and the signs of his presence passed away; the ivory table, the cloth of gold, and the heaps of precious stones, resumed the beauty and splendour which they had lost. The brothers once more breathed freely. Hitherto their eyes had been riveted by a kind of fascination on the mirror. They now looked anxiously around the apartment

itself; but it had undergone no change. If the old man had trodden upon it, not one trace of his footsteps had been left. They then turned their eyes towards the window. The street presented its usual appearance; there was the busy throng hurrying hither and thither, and splendid equipages and waggons laden with merchandise. But they saw nothing to remind them of the view presented by the mirror, save some few beggars who chanced to linger at their door. As Philargyr threw open the sash to inhale the fresh air, they eagerly asked the young merchants for alms; and there was not one who at that moment could refuse to give them; for the words of the stranger were fresh in their memory, and they felt every poor man to be a Messenger from the Great King.





CHAPTER II.

Christ before thy door is waiting—
 Rouse thee, slave of earthly gold!
Lo, He comes, thy pomp abating,
 Hungry, thirsty, homeless, cold.

LYRA INNOCENTIUM.

THE brothers were too deeply affected by the warning of the old man to proceed to the immediate division of their wealth. At one time, they even contemplated holding it in common, and consulted together on the best means of restoring it to the Great King. But, from the first, their views differed so greatly, that they could agree on no settled plan: and during the interval consumed in their discussions, their feelings underwent a partial change. The words of the stranger seemed to lose their distinctness. Their riches recovered, in some degree, the value they had lost; and at length they reverted to their original plan of dividing them into four parts, so that each might take his own share, and do with it as he pleased.

Philargyr was entrusted with the division. Many months elapsed while he was absorbed in his calculations, and

settling how large a portion he might appropriate to himself. During this time he was more than once interrupted by Messengers from the Great King. But their applications



were in vain. He always returned the same answer, that, until the property was divided, no portion of it could be transmitted to the Royal Palace.

At length the division was made. The younger brothers

were satisfied, though none were able to follow the calculations of Philargyr. Each had a share assigned to him, which, considering the shortness of their probable sojourn in the city, seemed inexhaustible, and each was left to follow his own course.

I proceed to give a brief sketch of their history.

The remarkable point in that of Philargyr, the eldest, was his utter forgetfulness, not only of the old man's warning, but of the law of the city in which he dwelt. Every act of his life appeared to set them at defiance. His one great object was to accumulate wealth. He neither trusted it to the King's Messengers, nor spent it in procuring the good-will of his fellow-citizens, but hoarded it up within the walls of his own house. There was no present gratification that he would not sacrifice in the hope of adding to his possessions for future years. And this he did with the sentence of exile hanging over his head, and the positive certainty, that, when he left the city, he would not be allowed to take the smallest portion of them away.

I have already said, that the inhabitants of Metœcia lived, for the most part, in forgetfulness of the law of Exile. But the conduct of Philargyr appeared unaccountable even to the most thoughtless among them. He was supposed to be under the influence of a spell; and the following legend was commonly reported through the city:—

There had been, it was rumoured, a mine of gold communicating with the house of the departed merchant. Philargyr had taken possession of it, unknown to his brothers. This mine was haunted by an evil spirit, who

had beguiled him by specious offers of assistance. For a time they had laboured together; but the evil spirit, while



pretending to work out the precious ore, had changed the mine into a dungeon, and bound Philargyr hand and foot

with chains of gold. After he had thus made him captive, he refused to allow him to return to the upper air, unless he would become his slave, and labour incessantly in bringing new treasures to the mine. It was further said that the golden bonds had never from that hour been removed: and that, though they were invisible to the naked eye, the signs of their presence might be detected in every look and gesture of the unhappy merchant. Thus his head was continually bent downwards, and his very walk constrained and embarrassed, because the chains and fetters that he wore weighed heavily upon him and impeded his steps.

Strange as this legend seems, it was, in the main, true. One part alone was incorrect. The spirit of the gold mine had not used threats or violence; he had, throughout, accomplished his purpose by treachery; and Philargyr had sunk, imperceptibly, into a state of servitude. His chains had been light and flexible when they were first twined around his limbs. It was while he wore them that, by little and little, they had increased in size and strength. For such was the nature of those bonds, that, when newly wrought, they were most easily broken. For this reason, he was not suffered to feel their pressure until they had been hardened by time; and even then, the change was so gradual, that Philargyr was not aware of it. The signs of his bondage, which seemed so clear to others, passed unnoticed by himself.

Still, however, he was a slave, and by little and little incurred the full misery of servitude, though to the last unconscious of its cause. Morning, noon, and evening,

he laboured for an insatiable master, who allowed him no share in the profits of his toil. Every day was passed in drudgery and weariness; every night in anxiety and care. Not an hour was given him to share the amusements of his fellow-citizens; not an hour for the duties of hospitality; not an hour for the quiet enjoyment of home. His whole time was claimed by the spirit of the gold-mine; and very heavy and monotonous was the task imposed upon him. If a child were forced to go on hour after hour casting up a sum, the figures of which were innumerable, he might form some idea of the employment of Philargyr. His wealth was to him but as an endless sum, and his most successful enterprises did but add some new figure to the account.

Yet even this would give no just notion of his misery. He could not help believing the old man's warning, though his whole life was at variance with his belief. He knew that his buried treasure would be worse than useless when the day of his exile arrived. The gates of the Glorious City would be closed against him, and endless wanderings in the dreary wilderness were certain to succeed the present season of anxiety and toil. His heart often shrank within him, as he witnessed the averted looks of the Messengers of the Great King. They did not even offer to carry his treasures to the Royal Palace, for long experience had taught them that it was a waste of words to seek employment from Philargyr. Again and again had he resolved to entrust them with some portion of his wealth, but the subtle chains of gold withheld his hand, and while he was struggling

against them, the opportunity passed by, and he deferred till the morrow his intended gift.

While the eldest of the four brothers thus laboured incessantly for the spirit of the mine, the second was following a very different path. He was unfettered by any chain of gold, and his bearing was high and noble; his step firm and free. He looked down on his very riches with disdain, and they won him the envy and admiration of his fellow-citizens instead of their pity and contempt. But while in every other respect his conduct afforded a marked contrast to that of Philargyr, there was one important point in which he resembled him. He neglected altogether the old man's warning.

There was a district in Metœcia, far removed from the stir and traffic of the crowded streets, and farther still from the dwellings of the King's Messengers. It was remarkable for the beauty and costliness of its buildings. The erection of these formed a favourite occupation of the more wealthy merchants. Their appearance was very irregular, for the size and form of each varied with the taste and resources of the individual who raised it. But all might be comprehended under two great classes. Some were frail and unsubstantial, and intended to please the eye for one short summer, and then make way for others not less perishable than themselves, while some were built of firm and durable materials, in the hope that they might stand for centuries as memorials of their architects. The one class were for the most part called villas of Pleasure—the other towers of Fame.

It was to the erection of one of these latter that Megacles devoted his vast wealth. The whole energy of his mind was given to this single object, and its gradual accomplishment was watched by his fellow-citizens with the most eager interest. The raising of the tower formed quite an epoch in the history of Metœcia. Wonderful stories were told of the depth of its foundations and the thickness of its walls. Each of the vast stones seemed to have its own legend annexed to it, while the quarry from which they came, and the names of the workmen, and every detail connected with the building, were carefully preserved in the annals of the city. But all this I must pass over very briefly, for the King's Messengers had no share in the work; and from this cause the whole narrative of the tower, which appeared so eventful to Megacles and his brother merchants, has but little interest in the present story.

The whole soul of Megacles was absorbed in the erection of the building; and these few words comprise his history. He did not keep aloof from his fellow-citizens, but he made his intercourse with them subservient to this one object. If he visited the crowded streets, it was in order to select workmen of skill and strength. If he went into the market-place, it was to change his gold and jewels for blocks of marble and granite. His perseverance was rewarded, and his work prospered. Day after day the tower increased in size and beauty. It was to no purpose that the wind and storm beat against it; the firm foundations defied their power. The wreck of the surrounding buildings was made to assist its growth. Some of these had been left as frag-

ments, in consequence of the sudden exile of the architects. Some were mouldering away with the lapse of time; and some were purposely undermined by the workmen of Megacles. He selected from the ruins of each such stones as seemed suited for the accomplishment of his design; until at length his tower arose so far above every other in the city, that it appeared to stand by itself in solitary grandeur.

The more it grew, the more was the mind of Megacles absorbed in its growth. It seemed to exercise a fascination over him, and from the day in which it became visible from every part of the city, his eye was seldom withdrawn from it. This may in part account for his neglect of the King's Messengers. His look was raised above them while he watched his tower. Even if they ventured to speak to him, their voices failed to arrest his attention; for his ear had been so long filled with the din and tumult of building, that it had been rendered deaf to any gentler sound.

Yet, notwithstanding his success, Megacles was not happy. He was perpetually changing or adding to his tower. It never seemed to have attained the perfection that he designed. He remembered also how the city of Metœcia was liable to the shock of earthquakes, so that at any moment the vast fabric might be shaken from its foundation, and reduced to a heap of ruins. Neither was this all. Even at those times in which he was able to view with unmingled satisfaction the tower itself, there was still a cloud upon his vision of glory. It had arisen, in the first instance, from the simple question of a poor wayfaring

man. Megacles had observed him gaze earnestly at the building, and then turn aside, as though to conceal his tears. He could not help inquiring what train of thoughts it had called forth to lead to such an expression of sorrow.



There was a strange sadness in the wayfarer's reply. "I was thinking," he said, "how long this vast tower was calculated to last."--"How long!" exclaimed Megacles, with indignant pride; "centuries on centuries will elapse, and there shall be no symptoms of decay."—"And I was

also thinking," he continued, in the same melancholy tone, "how long its possessor will remain within its walls!"

The wayfarer had disappeared before Megacles could reply, but the unwelcome words kept recurring to his mind in spite of every effort to suppress them. It was true that only half the period usually allotted to the merchants for their sojourn in Metœcia had as yet passed by; but he knew that, at any moment, his sentence of exile might be pronounced, and that the strength of his tower would not delay its enforcement for a single hour. The warning of the old man now came back to his remembrance, and brought with it new feelings of disquietude and alarm. Where were the immense riches that had been entrusted to his care? Had any portion of them been laid up in the Royal Palace? Alas! he shrank from the reply. He had not, indeed, buried them in the earth like Philargyr. On the contrary, he had often lavished them with an unsparing hand. But, while he had seldom failed to examine those who came for them on their health, their strength, and their skill in building, he had forgotten the one only important question,—he had never asked, whether they were Messengers of the Great King.

There was a time when, as these thoughts passed through the mind of Megacles, he half formed the resolution of pulling down, stone by stone, the tower which he had raised, and giving the materials to the King's Messengers. But the dread of ridicule and pride of heart prevailed. He felt that he should incur the mockery of his brother merchants, if, after years of incessant labour, his own hand were to destroy

the sole produce of his toil. He once more fixed his gaze steadfastly on the lofty building, and resolved to suppress every doubt and alarm. His efforts were at length successful. Not only did his former triumphant feeling return, but a yet more fatal delusion seized him. He fancied the story of the King's Messengers, and the Royal Palace, and the Glorious City, to be a mere invention ; and maintained that, notwithstanding the law of Exile, the only sure and lasting resting-place was to be found in the tower of Fame.

Alas! even while he was giving vent to these boastful words, his own sentence of exile had gone forth, and the bearer of the Royal Mandate was at hand. But we must leave him awhile, to follow the history of the two remaining brothers.



CHAPTER III.

'Tis not the eye of keenest blaze,
  Nor the quick swelling breast
That soonest thrills at touch of praise:
  These do not please him best.
But voices low and gentle,
  And timid glances shy,
That seem for aid parental
  To sue all wistfully.

CHRISTIAN YEAR.

THE story of Euprepes, the third brother, differs greatly from the two that have preceded it. The warning of the old man did not merely leave a transient impression upon his mind, but gave a colouring to his whole course of action. He talked of it loudly and frequently to his fellow-citizens, and described, in affecting language, the wonderful vision which the mirror had disclosed. As soon as he received his share of his father's wealth, he resolved to spend no portion on the pleasures of the city, but to transmit the whole to the King's Palace.

He did not fail to make public his intention; and there were no lack of Messengers. First one, then another came, each with his own tale of poverty or distress, and each pro-

mising to carry safely the treasure committed to his trust. Euprepes gave to all alike with an unsparing hand; but he soon grew weary of the monotony of the employment. All went on quietly day after day. There was no interest or excitement. His proceedings were either unobserved or disregarded by the greater part of the inhabitants of the city. He fancied that this was, in part, the fault of his Messengers. As soon as they received his gifts, they used studiously to conceal them and shrink from the observation of those who met them in the streets. In order to prevent this, he directed that they should carry the bags of money openly in their hands, and from time to time give public notice of the object of their journey. Some few refused compliance, and were immediately dismissed his service.

This expedient, in part, succeeded. The Messengers were often seen and questioned, and more than one friend congratulated Euprepes on the store he was laying up in the Royal Palace. Still, however, he was dissatisfied. He required something more than this. The way of sending the money seemed to him out of keeping both with the vastness of his wealth and with the important object for which it was sent. Bright visions would cross his mind of long triumphal processions through the streets of the city, and of shouts and acclamations attending their progress.

Now, while he was indulging these thoughts, a man in the garb of a herald stood before him. His form, at first, was dim and uncertain; but as the young merchant gazed upon it, it gradually increased in distinctness. He wore a gorgeous livery, and had a golden trumpet in his hand.

He thus addressed himself to Euprepes:—"Your noble purpose has been long known to me; neither have you been remiss in carrying it into effect. But there is one thing which you have forgotten. Such wealth as yours should not be trusted to a few scattered Messengers, who wander some here and some there, and hide themselves in the obscure corners of the city. You require the assistance of a herald to summon them all at a stated period, and then to marshal them in their ranks and arrange the order of their procession. Let, then, that office be mine."

The whole complexion of the life of Euprepes was changed by this proposal. He at once adopted the herald's suggestion, and the monotony of which he had complained passed away. From henceforth his embassies to the Royal Palace excited no less interest in the city than the tower of Megacles, while they proved to himself a source of perpetual triumph. It will be sufficient to describe one of them; for, though they seemed to his brother merchants to present an endless variety of appearance, the principal features in all are in reality alike, and the first embassy that he sent will give a true view of his history.

When the day for the grand procession had been fixed, the herald sounded his trumpet, and proclaimed it far and wide through the streets of the city. In the meanwhile the young merchant collected many costly bales of merchandise, and exchanged a large quantity of jewels for silver and gold. As all this was done publicly in the market-place, it tended greatly to increase the general interest. The doors of his own mansion were closed, and the few solitary Messengers

who came to them from time to time were dismissed with orders to return together on the day announced by the herald.

On the appointed morning the windows of the neighbouring houses were thronged with spectators. Presently the crowd thickened in the street, until the whole of it was blocked up by persons professing to be King's Messengers. So vast was the concourse that many a poor widow and orphan struggled in vain to pass through it, and returned sadly to their own homes, without once obtaining a sight of the dwelling of Euprepes. At mid-day the young merchant appeared. He was attended by a splendid retinue of friends; near him were the bales of goods, and the gold and silver which he was about to distribute, but nearer still was the herald, who never failed to keep closely to his side. The sun shone fully upon them; and as its rays were reflected back by their bright apparel and the golden trumpet and the precious metals that lay scattered upon the ground, the air was rent with the acclamations of the assembled multitudes.

After the shouts had continued some minutes, the herald proclaimed silence; and Euprepes, taking coins of various sizes from the heaps at his side, scattered them indiscriminately among the people. A scene of fearful confusion followed, while each Messenger struggled for his share. Many of the most weak and sickly were crushed and trodden under foot. The young merchant could see but a small portion of their sufferings, yet even that gave rise to painful thoughts; but the whisperings from within were quickly suppressed by the loud voice of the herald, as he proclaimed,

"Hasten, hasten, ye Messengers; gather up the treasures of Euprepes the merchant, which he bids you bear to the distant Palace of the Great King."

It was not until the vast stores which Euprepes had provided for the occasion were exhausted that the tumult ceased. And then the herald arranged the messengers in a long procession, that they might march publicly through the city. It was a strange sight to see that troop of miserable objects, moving along to the sound of a trumpet, with all the external signs of triumph and joy. The misery of their general appearance formed, for the most part, a singular contrast to the costly burdens which they bore. Many of them seemed conscious of this, and shrank instinctively from the observation of their fellows; but none were permitted to desert the order of march; and ever as they advanced onward the voice of the herald proclaimed louder and louder, "Behold, ye citizens, behold the riches of Euprepes, which he sends before him to the distant Palace of the Great King."

The procession was so arranged as to be kept continually within view of the young merchant. He watched its course through the market-place, and up and down the principal streets of the city. From the point at which he stood, he could hear distinctly the shouts of the populace and the proclamation of the herald; and there he remained, watching and listening, until the shades of evening closed in, and the reality was lost in a bright and beautiful dream. For in the visions of the night procession after procession continued to pass before him; they were all laden with costly offerings for the Royal Palace,—some of silver and gold, some of

bales of merchandise, some of glorious apparel,—but they kept moving round and round the city, and with the inconsistency of a dream it did not seem strange to Euprepes that, though bound on a distant journey, they never passed beyond its walls.

Such was the general aspect of the processions of Euprepes. Some exceeded others in pomp and magnificence; but each was proclaimed by the same trumpet, and set in order by the same herald; so that, as I before said, one description will suffice for them all.

Meanwhile, his resources seemed inexhaustible. It was as though his treasure kept returning to himself, and the more he gave the more he had to bestow. Of all the brothers he was by far the most popular; his sojourn in the city was cheered alike by the praises of the rich and the blessings of the poor. There were, indeed, some who murmured and repined, but their complaints were drowned by the trumpet of the herald, and never reached the ears of Euprepes. He believed himself to be idolised by all within the city, at the same time that he was laying up for himself an inexhaustible store of wealth beyond its walls. Sometimes his feelings were those of quiet self-complacency, sometimes of joyous triumph; but they were rarely overclouded by the slightest shadow of doubtfulness or alarm. The pursuits of his elder brothers were regarded by him with a kind of contemptuous compassion. He would often stand in the bright sunshine on the rising ground where his house was built, and point in derision to the tower of Megacles, or describe with bitterness the yet sadder slavery of Philargyr; and then

following with his eye the long train of his own Messengers he would conclude by saying, "I, too, have my tower, but it is built on a surer foundation; I, too have my treasures, but I have sent them to a safer home!"

The story of the fourth brother I cannot tell, for but little is known of his history. He did not resemble either Philargyr or Megacles, for he neither toiled and laboured for the spirit of the gold-mine, nor built for himself a tower of Fame; and yet he was also unlike Euprepes, for no herald attended him on his walks, and there was no array of Messengers to be seen continually at his door. Much of his time was passed in seclusion. His occupations were unknown; and he sojourned in the city of Metœcia as one who scarcely belonged to it. Those who watched with the greatest interest the different pursuits of the three elder brothers, were gradually led to forget the very existence of Sophron. There was no great event to mark it or force it upon their attention. At one time, indeed, he did excite a momentary sensation. He left the quarter of the city inhabited by the wealthy merchants and made a choice of a more lowly mansion, surrounded by the dwellings of the poor. His motives even for this change were never discovered. Some ascribed it to avarice, some to want. But it soon ceased to be a topic of conversation; and he was consigned to greater obscurity than before.

To the few friends who continued to visit him in his retirement he was always kind and hospitable; but there was a mystery about his way of life which they were unable to penetrate. As time went on, he still seemed to grow



poorer and poorer. Some secret drain appeared to exhaust his wealth. No sign of luxury was seen in his abode; his dress was changed for one of less costly materials; and his diet was of the simplest kind. All this was of itself strange; but there was something yet more unaccountable in the effect that it had upon Sophron himself. Every day his step grew lighter, and his countenance more full of joy. The look of depression and anxiety which during the days of his abundance he had at times worn, was now never seen upon his brow. One would have imagined that it was not his wealth, but some heavy burthen that had been taken away from him; he became so light and cheerful under its removal. When questioned as to the cause of this, he would sometimes answer by a smile, sometimes by a tear; and there were those who said that, though the smile of Sophron never failed to make the heart rejoice, his tear was yet more full of gladness than his smile.

The young merchant was really poor. The cause of his poverty, like the rest of his history, was buried in obscurity; but, whatever became of his money, it did not, like that of Euprepes, keep returning to him again. The praise of men never gilded his deeds of self-sacrifice, neither did earthly glory shed its brightness upon his path. And yet, after all, his lowly dwelling was not without its beautiful legend. There were some who could tell how, in the dim twilight, or in the still hour of night, they had seen the train of Royal Messengers moving stealthily from his door. They were not arranged in ranks, like those sent by Euprepes. Every individual walked alone. And yet it was clear that all

formed part of the same long procession, for each had his left hand muffled closely in his garments, while with the right he pointed to the East to mark the direction of his journey. Slowly and silently, one by one, they moved onward through the least frequented streets of the city. Not a footfall was heard as they passed along. At length they reached the Eastern gate. It was closed against them, but, like a long line of shadows, the procession still continued its unswerving course, and, passing straight through the opposing barrier, were lost in the darkness beyond.

These things were not, indeed, reported publicly in the city. Few of the wealthy merchants had heard them at all, and fewer still believed them. Those who witnessed them felt their voices hushed by the solemnity of the scene. Its silence seemed, as it were, to rest upon them; and they could only whisper of it from ear to ear, or meditate upon it quietly in their own homes. And when they asked themselves with a thrill of eager interest, whither that long procession had gone, a voice within them would reply, "It is gone far, far beyond the boundaries of the city,—the barriers were unable to arrest its progress,—and it now bears the treasures of Sophron to the distant Palace of the Great King."

Such was the legend: but there is one part of it which yet remains to be told. It was said that when the few who had witnessed the secret procession, returned to the street in which the merchant lived, they perceived his doorway to be strewed with pearls, while an amber light shone around his dwelling, and strains of gentle music were heard from

within its walls. So soft was that light, that it seemed but to shed its colouring on the surrounding darkness—so quiet that music, that the stillness of the night was unbroken by the sound. They stood gazing at a distance. They were afraid to venture near, lest, like a scene of enchantment, it should vanish from their view; and there was a fascination in it, which would not suffer them to depart. The eye never grew weary of watching that lovely radiance, nor the ear of listening to that celestial melody. At length the sun arose, and then the vision passed away; or rather, though the soft light and quiet music never ceased to bless the house of Sophron, they could not be seen and heard in the glare and turmoil of the day. The pearls also were no longer visible. There were some, indeed, who fancied they could still perceive them; but when they stooped to gather them, they found only the drops of morning dew which lay upon the ground.



CHAPTER IV.

> We barter life for pottage ; sell true bliss
> For wealth or power, for pleasure or renown ;
> Thus, Esau-like, our Father's blessing miss,
> Then wash with fruitless tears our faded crown.
>
> CHRISTIAN YEAR.

DAYS, months, and years rolled on in the same unvaried course. Philargyr continued to toil and labour, and every hour gathered in fresh riches for his insatiable master. Megacles received early the sentence of Exile, but his tower remained as his memorial in the city. Euprepes still dazzled the eyes of the multitude by his costly gifts and gorgeous processions. Sophron alone lived a life of obscurity. The wealth, the fame, and the liberality of the three elder brothers had severally passed into a proverb. Many were the discussions concerning their conduct and character; for in spite of the contempt in which Philargyr was generally held, even he had his tribe of flatterers and partisans, and it was remarked that their number increased as the time of his banishment drew near. But no allusion was made to the law of Exile in any of the conversations concerning the

brothers. I have already accounted for this silence. Notwithstanding the King's warnings, the citizens for the most part were accustomed to regard Metœcia as their last



dwelling-place. It seemed as though some heavy mist were resting upon them: and their low range of thought was bounded by the narrow circuit of their own walls.

A protracted sojourn in the city fell to the portion of

Philargyr, though the progress of time served only to increase the burthen of his servitude. He was carrying a



heavy load of gold to the secret mine, and toiling and groaning beneath its weight, when the old man met him on

his way. For a moment he gazed steadfastly on the weary merchant, and then with a smile of bitter irony offered to relieve him. Philargyr trembled. He endeavoured at first to persuade himself that it was but a re-appearance of the same image which he had seen in the mirror; but his limbs tottered, and his cheek grew pale, and there was a numbness at his heart, which convinced him that the actual form of the old man now stood before him, and he could not doubt the nature of the message which he bore.

At length, in much terror and perplexity, and scarcely conscious of the meaning of his own words, he thus addressed him:—"Stranger," he cried, "if, indeed, thou art charged with the sentence of exile, leave me yet a little while. I have great treasure in this city. Wait till my camels and asses are laden, and my slaves with their bags of gold are ready to accompany us, and then we will hasten on our journey."

But the stranger replied—and the cold, stern accents fell as ice on the heart of Philargyr: "O merchant, what vain words are these! You know well that whoever travels with me travels alone. Your camels and asses, your slaves, your silver, and your gold cannot accompany us. The wealth that you have sent beforehand to the Royal Palace is now your own; but all that remains in the city is lost to you for ever."

Then did the vision in the mirror rise in distinct and fearful remembrance to the mind of Philargyr. It was but mockery to speak to him of treasure sent beforehand to the Royal Palace. The accumulated gains of his many years

of labour were all stored up in the fatal mine. He had counted them over but yesterday; not a single coin was missing—all were there. Now, as he thought of this, he turned his eyes imploringly to the old man; but in a moment he again averted his gaze, for he perceived him to be no longer alone. A dark and terrible crowd of attendants were ranged around. They were armed with scourges of iron, which they raised on high, as though ready at any moment to drive him forth into the dreary wilderness that lay beyond the city.

At length he cried out, in accents of mingled fear and remorse, "Alas! O stranger, hitherto I have neglected your warning. The whole of my wealth is still within the city. But, surely, you yourself are a King's Messenger! Have compassion, then, upon me, and even now bear it quickly to the Royal Palace."

But the old man replied, "You ask what cannot be. I am indeed a King's Messenger, but I bear no treasure with me to the Royal Palace; for all things change at my touch, and crumble into decay. Those charged with that office have been with you long ago,—the poor, the afflicted, and the infirm;—they would have conveyed your riches thither, if you had not driven them empty-handed from your door." Darker and more terrible grew the train of the old man's followers, as Philargyr listened to these fearful words. Once more the iron scourges were raised on high; but the unhappy merchant, in a voice of the deepest misery, implored the respite of a single day.

"To-morrow," he said, "to-morrow all shall be in readi-

ness. I will even now summon the King's Messengers, and send the whole of my wealth beyond the walls of the city. Spare me, if it be but for a few hours. Your coming was unlooked for, and therefore it has found me unprepared."

"It is false," replied the old man, sternly. "My coming has been very slow and gradual. During the still hours of the night, you heard, one by one, the sound of my footsteps, while I was yet at a distance from the city. Your limbs grew feeble, and your hair gray, and your heart dull and cold; and you knew well that these signs preceded the approach of the last Messenger of the Great King. Each warning made you struggle for a little while, to separate yourself from your gold. But it held you in bonds; and you could not set yourself free. If I were to leave you now, the result would be the same. You would go on clinging to your riches, or rather they would go on clinging to you, even if you were suffered to remain whole centuries in the city."

Philargyr felt that the old man's words were but too fearfully true. He had for many years been expecting the bearer of the Royal Mandate. So slow had been his approach, that days, weeks, and months seemed to mark the interval of each succeeding step. Time had been thus allowed for the gradual removal of all his wealth. The appointed Messengers had repeatedly called for it; but after a faint effort to give it them, he had sent them away till the morrow. And the cause of this was, as I have said, the chain of gold which had been twined round his hands by the spirit of the mine. It had been light and fragile

once, but it was a magic chain, which grew more firm and massive with the lapse of years. The time had been, when the captive, by one vigorous struggle, might have set himself free. But each weak and unsuccessful effort served



only to increase its strength; and the links had become so firmly riveted, that his own hand was all too feeble to dissolve them now.

The unhappy merchant had, as we have seen, long bent beneath the weight of this chain; but he now perceived it for the first time as it was wrenched asunder by the iron

grasp of the stranger's hand, and in a moment he was parted for ever from his vast wealth, and, while the scourges fell heavily upon him, driven forth as an exile beyond the walls of the city.

We will now leave Philargyr, and bring to a close the story of Megacles. A no less sad and fearful picture awaits us there. He was, as I have said, summoned early, and the day of his exile followed close on the warning of the wayfaring man. But I have thought it better to make no change in the order of his history.

The old man found him in all the fulness of his strength. He was arrayed in purple and costly apparel, and stood gazing with an eye of pride on the tower which he had raised. A crowd of eager partisans were gathered around. The bearer of the Royal Mandate passed through the midst of them, with a slow and silent step; and his finger had long pointed to Megacles, before he himself became aware of his approach. It was the looks of those which stood around which first warned him that the day of his exile had arrived.

No sooner, however, did he become conscious of the old man's presence, than he endeavoured to face him with an undaunted air. "Stranger," he said boldly, "your summons to me is vain. I ask no dwelling-place in the Glorious City. Here, in Metœcia, have I built myself a tower; and here, in Metœcia, shall be my lasting home." There was a shout of applause from the surrounding multitude; but the old man neither spoke nor moved. Coldly and steadfastly he gazed upon the merchant, until the proud spirit of Megacles quailed beneath his look, and the boast-

ful words seemed to wither on his lips, while every limb was shaken with convulsive terror. He turned away his face from the unwelcome Messenger, and endeavoured to gather new courage from the contemplation of his tower of Fame. But there was a haze which now encircled it; it appeared to be already fading in the distance; and he could hardly distinguish the building itself from its long dark shadow which rested upon the ground.

At length the old man broke the silence:- "It is ever thus, O merchant!—the objects in this city become, for the most part, the same with their shadows, when I approach them. But take my glass, and you will once more behold distinctly the building that you have raised." As he said this, he held out a glass to Megacles. The merchant took it, almost unconsciously. For a moment he looked through it, and then, with a cold shudder, suffered it to fall from his hand. His lofty tower had dwindled into a sepulchre, when seen through the glass which the stranger had given him. But diminutive as it now appeared, there was an inscription engraved distinctly upon it; and he had read only too plainly these fatal words:- "Here lie the garments which Megacles once wore."

"Yes," said the old man, with a smile of scorn, "it is not for yourself that you have raised this lofty tower, but for the garments which you wear! They shall remain in the city, and rest beneath it, until the moth and worm have eaten them away. But for yourself you have prepared no dwelling-place, and you will be driven forth a homeless wanderer in the wilderness."

The last feeling of self-confidence now died away from the heart of Megacles. Instead of the crowd of eager partisans, he saw only the same gloomy attendants which afterwards appeared to Philargyr. He felt that his tower would avail him nothing; and that, if the gates of the Royal City were closed against him, no hope of safety could remain. The past rose in bitter remembrance before him; and, as he thought over the numerous workmen that he had employed on his building, he tried to recollect some one among the number who might prove to have been a Messenger of the Great King.

The effort, however, was vain; and the secret feeling of his heart belied his words, as he advanced a claim to treasure in the Royal Palace. "Stranger," he said, "I have not altogether neglected the warning which you gave. My riches are not buried in a mine; I have dispersed them far and near, and know not whither they are gone. Some perhaps may have remained within the city, but surely some portion must have escaped beyond its walls. If the King's Messengers came to me they received their share with the rest: I never wilfully drove them away. Oh, tell me, then, that there is some treasure prepared for me in the Royal Palace, and that the gates of the Glorious City will not be closed against me for ever!"

But the old man pointed to the tower as he replied, "Behold, Megacles, the one only monument of your wealth; it is there, and there alone, that all who received your wages or your gifts deposited their burthens. You yourself never failed to point it out to them as the object of their journey.

But neither is this all; the King's Messengers, though you knew them not, did indeed come to you among the rest. They were weak and helpless, and you loaded them with vast blocks of marble and granite which they were unable



to bear. Many sank beneath their burthens; others were crushed and maimed by stones falling from the building. It is true that their groans and lamentations never reached you. They were drowned by the noise and tumult which accompanied the erection of your tower. But the cries of the King's Messengers are carried by each passing wind

to the Royal Palace, and are heard and remembered there."

Megacles would fain have replied, but no time was allowed him for further words. The stranger touched him with his icy hand, and in an instant the dark attendants had stripped him of his raiment, and driven him with their scourges from the city. There were few who wept for his sudden departure, for Megacles was not loved; but his admirers and partisans gathered up his purple garments, and deposited them carefully beneath the tower. In a little while the moth and the worm had consumed them there; while the tower itself continued to stand for many ages,—a vain memorial of the spot where they had been laid.



CHAPTER V.

> There are in this loud stunning tide
> Of human care and crime,
> With whom the melodies abide
> Of th' everlasting chime;
> Who carry music in their heart
> Through dusky lane and wrangling mart,
> Plying their daily task with busier feet,
> Because their secret souls a holy strain repeat.
>
> CHRISTIAN YEAR.

EUPREPES saw the sentence of exile passed on both his elder brothers, and spoke with much eloquence of the misery of their fate. For himself, he said that he had long since been fully prepared to depart; all his treasures had been sent before him to the Royal Palace; and he was only anxious for the time when they would be restored to him again. Sometimes he would complain to his friends of the long delay of the bearer of the Royal Mandate, and declare that he was even then listening for his footstep, and would advance to welcome him at the first warning of his approach.

The stranger tarried long; but when he did come, the reality proved very different from the anticipations of

Euprepes. In spite of himself, he was conscious of a sensation of fear. First a strange darkness seemed to fall on the objects around him. Then doubts and misgivings flitted



like shadows across his mind; and the vision of the future as well as of the past and present was arrayed in less bright colouring than before. He advanced to meet the old man, but it was with the unsteady step of one walking in a mist; he addressed him in bold words of welcome, but it was

with a faltering voice, as though he felt doubtful of the reply.

"At length," he said, "thou hast arrived! But wherefore didst thou tarry so long? Was it that thy journey was delayed by the frequent train of Messengers that met thee on thy way? They were bearing my silver and my gold, my jewels and my merchandise, to the Great Monarch whom thou servest. I have much wealth laid up for me in his Palace. Come, then, let us hasten thither."

But the old man offered no reply; he merely fixed his cold, searching gaze upon the merchant; and while he did so, it seemed as though some terrible object rose up between them; and the shadow fell yet more darkly on the mind of Euprepes. He tried in vain to suppress his feelings of anxiety and alarm; they kept following one another like the waves of a troubled sea. At length he was forced to give way to them, and once more spoke to the old man, but with words of less confidence than before. "Stranger," he said, "from whence is this sensation of secret terror? I had looked to your coming as a time of sunshine and joy. Where are the good tidings that you have in store for me? Do not imagine that, like Megacles and Philargyr, I have neglected your warning. My wealth has been distributed among the King's Messengers. Week after week, in long procession, they left my door. Surely, surely, you must have seen many bags of gold and bales of merchandise in the Royal Palace, with the name of Euprepes written upon them!"

The old man replied, or rather, perhaps, though the words

seemed to come from him, it was the thoughts of Euprepes which made answer to themselves:



"O merchant! from the city in which you dwell to the land inhabited by the Great King is a long and dangerous

journey. It is true that many a Messenger has of late trodden it in safety, and rich and precious were the burthens which they bore. But a simple cross was the only mark either on the bags of gold or the bales of merchandise. If, therefore, the name of Euprepes was written upon yours, the whole of them must have been lost."

"Lost! lost!" exclaimed the unhappy man, in a voice of agony; "nay, it cannot be. The embassies were so frequent and numerous that some, at least, must have arrived: and even if it be otherwise, the whole city is a witness that I sent them. The air was rent with acclamations as they passed along; and far and near you could hear the voices of those who cried, 'This is the wealth of Euprepes, which he sends before him to the distant Palace of the Great King.'"

"It is not such sounds as those," replied the old man, "which ever reach the Royal Palace; they are lost in the din and tumult of the city, or heard only by the enemies of the King. But tell me, Euprepes, are you a merchant, and do you not know that those riches are moved most securely which are sent in secrecy and silence? If you had wished merely to transfer your possessions to a house in a neighbouring street, should you, in the first instance, have paraded them before your door, and told the bearers to display them openly to all who met them on their way? Surely, if you had done this, and they had been intercepted by thieves and robbers, the fault would have been your own."

Euprepes could make no reply; and yet he murmured



something of a hope that the soldiers of the Great King would not have suffered the Messengers to be plundered on their journey. But the old man, in a sterner voice, thus continued to address him:

"I will tell you, Euprepes, what has become of your wealth. There is an enchanter that dwells in this city; his name is Pride, and he is an enemy of the Great King. He it was who sent the herald to summon the Messengers to your door. The sound of his trumpet never fails to change the purest gold and silver into brass and glittering tinsel. These were the offerings that you really sent; but even these did not reach the destination for which you intended them. The enchanter wove his magic circles round the feet of your Messengers, so that they followed one another in the same endless track, without ever advancing one step upon their journey."

A new and fearful light now burst upon the mind of Euprepes. He remembered how, in the visions of the night, he had continually seen the long processions moving round and round. Never for a moment had he lost sight of them in the distance, or formed a wish to trace their course beyond the city. Alas! in these dreams he had seen but the image of his actual Messengers, though it was the enchanter who placed before his eyes the glass in which they appeared. His head grew dizzy, and his heart sick, as they rose to his remembrance; but he still made one last effort to lay claim to a recompense from the Great King.

"It was gold," he said,—"it was pure gold that I gave; and, though it may have been changed and rendered worth-

less, to me at least it was of real value. If it failed to purchase for me an inheritance in the Royal Palace, it surely ought to have been restored to me again. Philargyr hoarded his vast wealth; Megacles built with his a tower of Fame; mine alone has been unprofitably spent, and brought me no recompense within the city, and yet none beyond its walls."

"Merchant," replied the old man, "you know well that you have long since had your reward. The applause of your fellow-citizens fell like a golden shower upon your path; and their goodwill and gratitude have been to you as bales of costly merchandise. It was thus that the wealth which you professed to give never ceased to come back to you again. Like Philargyr, you did but traffic with your possessions, and they brought you in a full and abundant return. Your tower, also, like that of Megacles, is built within the city. It is true that your own hands have not laboured in its erection, but day by day you have stood watching it in secret, and listened to the shouts and acclamations which marked its growth. It may, perhaps, have seemed to you to be rising afar off in the territory of the Great King; but this delusion was caused by the same enchanter who sent you the herald. He spread a mist before your eyes, which made an object appear to be in the distance which was really near at hand. Your range of sight has never passed beyond the boundaries of the city; every hope and wish of your heart has been confined within it, and there also was your treasure and your home."

Then did the attendants with the iron scourges seize

upon Euprepes, and strip him of his garments; and he, too, was driven forth into the dreary wilderness. But the scourgers were unseen by those who witnessed his departure, neither could they hear the fearful words in which the sentence of exile was conveyed. And so it was, that, after he was gone, the long train of his Messengers continued to parade the streets; while the false herald with the golden trumpet proclaimed far and near that the happy exile had been received within the gates of the Glorious City, and that all his treasures had been restored to him there.

Such was the fearful history of the three elder brothers. It is a relief to turn aside from it, and seek a resting-place in Sophron's lowly dwelling. He had wept bitterly for their exile, but he did not, like Euprepes, make a display of his compassion, or boast of his own readiness to depart. His tears had flowed in secret, and his hopes also were cherished in the solitude of his own bosom. Every day he put his little room in readiness for the stranger's coming, and was so constantly preparing for it that he may be almost said to have lived in his immediate presence. Yet he, like the rest, was conscious of some change of feeling when his actual summons arrived.

He was at the time enjoying the quiet beauty of the evening hour. It mattered not that a vase with a few autumnal flowers was the only ornament of his humble abode; and that the flame burnt faint and feebly in the solitary lamp which was standing at their side. Sophron could not really be in darkness, poverty, or alone; for, as

the shades of night closed in, the pearls appeared upon his threshold, the soft music spoke to him as a companion, and the amber light shed its radiance around. His heart was full of gratitude for these blessings, when a mingled feeling of awe and sadness stole upon him, and it seemed as though some shadow were moving along the wall. Every object changed as the dark outline fell upon it;—the flame of the solitary lamp burned even more dimly than before, and the autumnal flowers began to wither and decay. It needed not these signs to warn Sophron that it was the same figure that had appeared in the mirror. For a while he watched it with a calm and steadfast gaze; presently a sensation of weariness stole upon him, his thoughts grew confused and indistinct, and at length he sank in a state of partial unconsciousness upon the ground.

When he again opened his eyes, the old man was standing at his side. No gloomy attendants were near, but he held a mirror in his hand. Beneath it were the words:— "This is the image of the Past." The scene which it reflected was one that had been long familiar to Sophron, and he did not shrink from beholding it now. From time to time soft shadowy forms moved across the glass; they were, doubtless, the images of the King's Messengers; but the eye of Sophron did not for a moment rest upon them, for ever as they appeared, his thoughts wandered to the Royal Palace and Glorious City.

At length the old man addressed him. "Oh, merchant," he said, "how is this? All signs of wealth and luxury are wont to vanish at my presence, but it is not so with thy

abode. Even as I crossed the threshold of thy door, pearls of inestimable value were scattered upon the ground. They can be no part of the treasure of this city; for, when I trod



silently upon, them, they were not sullied by my step, but only shone with a purer brightness than before!"

"Stranger," replied Sophron, "I cannot tell. You say

truly that they are no part of the treasure of the city. The whole of my father's vast wealth could not have purchased one of them. They are as the pearls of the far East, and I have looked upon them as gifts from the Great King; but I know not what hand has scattered them thus plenteously at the threshold of my door."

He had hardly finished speaking, when a shadowy form moved across the mirror, and there was a voice from thence which said, "I was a widow, poor and destitute, but a Messenger of the Great King. I went to Philargyr for relief, and he told me that his money was his own. I came to Sophron, and he spoke soft words of comfort, and ministered to my wants, and bade me take freely of his treasures, for it was for my sake that the Great King had placed them in his hands. I wept with joy and gratitude when I left him; and each tear has been changed by the Great King into a pearl, and remained to this hour on the threshold of his abode."

And the old man said, "Oh, merchant, from whence is this wonderful melody that I hear? Sure I am that none of the musicians in this city could produce such strains. Their harps lose their tunefulness, and their sweetest notes become harsh and discordant, when I am standing near. But this music has some magic power. My presence only renders it more distinct and perfect than before, and even my own voice is moved into harmony by the sound."

"Stranger," replied Sophron, "I cannot tell. You say truly that the music has a magic power, for it lends its own tunefulness to all around. To me it has long since breathed

a spirit of harmony over the din and discord of this crowded city; every care and anxiety has been changed and modulated by its soothing influence: and the events of day after day have seemed to flow on in perpetual melody. But though the music has thus dwelt in my own home, and I have loved it, and listened to it with gladness, I believe it to be but the echo of a yet sweeter strain which is played afar off in some distant land."

Again there was a voice from the mirror; its accents were low and tremulous, like those of a little child, and it said, "I was an orphan, weak and friendless, but a Messenger of the Great King. I went to Megacles for succour, and he pointed to a block of marble, and bade me raise it on high: but my hands were too feeble for the task; and then his attendants drove me away, and said there was no place for little children in the tower of Fame. I came to Sophron; and he fed me and clothed me, and told me that the house in which he lived had been lent to him as a shelter for the orphan child. Every morning and evening I went in secret to the Great King, and carried with me each precious gift that I received from Sophron; and he bade me take back to him in return the offering of a simple heart overflowing with gratitude and love. So it was that my looks and words became to his home as a perpetual song; and this is the soft music which you hear within its walls."

And the old man said, "Tell me, Sophron, from whence is this light that sheds its radiance on all around? Sure I am that it belongs not to this city; for night has thrown her

dark mantle over its streets, and, even if it were otherwise, mists and chilling darkness are the signs of my approach. The flame of your own lamp grew more faint and feeble when my shadow first fell upon it, and is fast expiring now. Whence, then, is it that in thy dwelling there seems to be perpetual day?"

A soft slumber was stealing upon Sophron; his eyes were already closed; his voice was indistinct, and yet it sounded like happy music as for the last time he replied, "Stranger, I cannot tell. The light has indeed shone upon me; nay, is shining upon me now. My eyes are closed, and I see it not; but it is as the sunshine of the heart, and I feel it to be here. Whether it be a reality or a beautiful dream, I am conscious of its presence, though I know not from whence it comes."

Then, for the third time, a voice proceeded from the mirror, as a shadowy form moved across it, and it said, "I had been rich and prosperous, but a long sickness brought me into poverty and distress. I heard the proclamation of Euprepes, and made a feeble effort to reach his door; but the crowd, and the glare, and the noise of the trumpet, overwhelmed me with fear and shame. I shrank back in silence, and hid myself in the obscurity of my own solitary dwelling. Sophron sought me out and found me there. He tended me in my sickness and ministered to my wants, and bade me be of good cheer, for I had a secret store of wealth, even the prayers and blessings of a poor man; and, when I spoke to him of gratitude, he asked me to give him some portion of my treasure. Then did I remember that

poverty and distress had made me a Messenger of the Great King, and I hastened to the Royal Palace, and took with me thither my blessings and my prayers. The Great King received them from me, and shed them as rays of unchanging sunshine on the abode of Sophron, and from thence comes the amber light that yet lives within its walls."

There was a pause of a few seconds; while Sophron appeared to be yielding more and more to the soothing influence of sleep. And then the old man breathed softly upon him, and said, "Thrice happy merchant! Well, indeed, hast thou traded with thy wealth! Thou hast bartered thy perishable silver and gold for the widow's gratitude, the orphan's love, and the poor man's prayer. Now that thou art going hence, these riches will follow thee. The costly pearls, the gentle music, and the amber light shall attend thee on thy journey even to the gates of the Glorious City. But a more abundant treasure, a more perfect harmony, and a light of brilliance unutterable, await thee there."

As he thus spoke, he placed a second mirror before the eyes of Sophron; and though they now seemed to be sealed in slumber, a smile of joy and gladness played across his countenance. I cannot tell how bright and glorious was the vision that he saw. This alone I know, that the image of the Future was reflected in that glass, and that, as the old man held it, his own form faded away. For a moment there was a sound as of the rustling of many wings in the air, and then all was stillness in the dwelling of Sophron.

On the morrow, the sun shone brightly upon the city;—



there was the usual hum of traffic and moving to and fro of the busy multitude in the streets, though the lamp had been extinguished in Sophron's abode, and the aged merchant was gone. Very few of the passers-by noticed the deserted dwelling; but the King's Messengers wept as they beheld it at a distance, and there was a strain of sadness in the gentle music of the orphan child. They mourned, because their own office was at an end; but when they thought of Sophron, their sorrow was turned into joy. They knew that his treasures had been marked with the Cross, and were stored up for him in the Royal Palace, and that he himself was dwelling in the happy city where the law of Exile was unknown.



CONCLUSION.

A SILENCE of some minutes succeeded the story. Both the children were grave and thoughtful. Leonard looked anxious to say something, but seemed to want courage to begin the conversation. To relieve him from his embarrassment, Mr. Mertoun addressed himself in the first instance to Mary.

"Tell me, Mary," he said, "do you suppose there ever was a city with the same singular law as that of Metœcia?"

"Oh yes, uncle," she replied readily; "I guessed at once what you intended by it; the story is an allegory, and the law of Exile is the law of Death."

"It is so," said Mr. Mertoun. "The whole world is but our city of Metœcia. We are liable, at any moment, to be called upon to depart from it; and, when our summons comes, we go forth alone, and no part of our possessions follow us. If we live in forgetfulness of this law, our conduct is, to say the least, as unaccountable as that of the merchants in the story. But what do you understand by the vision in the mirror?"

Mary hesitated, and Leonard answered for her, "I

suppose, uncle, the thoughts awakened by the death of friends."

"You are right," said Mr. Mertoun; "our seasons of bereavement are those in which we feel most distinctly the nothingness of worldly treasures, and are led to take a true view of our position as pilgrims and sojourners upon the earth. The warnings of Holy Scripture, which we may have often heard and disregarded, are then so forced upon our minds, that we cannot set them aside. But tell me, Leonard, what particular duty connected with the instability of riches is the story designed to illustrate?"

The boy coloured as he replied, "The duty of giving to the poor;—and I know why you told it us. But," he added, with some slight hesitation, "I hope you do not think that I am like Philargyr?"

"I have seen but little of either you or Mary," answered Mr. Mertoun, "and cannot even tell to which of the three dangerous paths pointed out in the allegory your natural dispositions may incline. But my design in telling it was to bring distinctly before you the important office assigned to the poor in the Gospel. I was afraid that you were unmindful of it when a few days since you used the words, 'Only some poor man.'"

"I was, indeed," he answered; "and for the future, I will try to look upon the poor as Messengers of the Great King. But, uncle," he continued, after a pause, "do you mean that all who neglect almsgiving are like some one or other of the merchants in the story?"

"I think," replied Mr. Mertoun, "that all who abuse

their riches, may be comprehended under the three great classes that I have described. First, we have those like Philargyr, who do not spend them at all: next, those like Megacles, who spend them, but not on proper objects: and, lastly, those like Euprepes, who spend them, and on proper objects, but not with a proper motive."

"It was not quite that which I intended to ask," said Leonard. "Is it not possible to be partly like one and partly like another?"

"Undoubtedly," replied Mr. Mertoun; "I have in the story purposely kept the lines clear and distinct, in order to trace the course of each separately. But in actual life they often seem to cross one another, and without careful self-examination we cannot tell to which path even we ourselves may be inclining. There is, however, a yet more important difference between actual life and the allegory. The merchants are represented only as the possessors of great wealth, and with the single duty of almsgiving. Is that a complete view of our position as Christians?"

"Oh no," replied Mary; "you said, when you explained to us the Parable of the Talents, that our health, our time, our affections, and the events of our daily life, all form part of the Talents for which we shall have to account."

"They do," said Mr. Mertoun; "and the Talent of Wealth, though distinct from the rest, never in actual life stands apart from them. The exercise of it must be kept in harmony with the discharge of our other duties. The amount and manner of our alms should depend, not merely on our means, but on the circumstances in which we are

placed. It may be laid down as a general rule, that the wish to give, and to give without ostentation, should be a moving principle with all alike; but in each particular instance it will be controlled and limited by a variety of events that it is impossible to define. There is yet another omission in the allegory."

"Do you mean," asked Leonard, "that the merchants only received a single warning, and went on in the same course to the end of their career?"

"It was not that to which I referred," answered Mr. Mertoun, "though certainly, in that respect also, their supposed case is but an imperfect representation of our own. Each line in the story is brought almost uninterruptedly to an end. In actual life, they may be broken off by God's mercy, and Philargyr, or Megacles, become as Sophron. Still, however, the allegory is a true representation of the course of unrepented sin. The omission of which I speak occurs rather in the history of the youngest brother."

"You mean," said Mary, "that we cannot really lay up for ourselves riches in Heaven, and that all we do is accepted for the sake of our Saviour. But was not that intended by the mark of the cross which was seen on the merchandise?"

"It is implied in it," replied Mr. Mertoun, "but it does not form, so to speak, any distinct feature in the allegory."

"But ought there to be so many omissions in the story?" asked Mary.

Mr. Mertoun replied, by taking up a drawing which happened to be lying on the table: "Tell me," he said, "do you know of what this is a picture?"

"Of the church," she replied, in some surprise at the question.

"Indeed," said her uncle. "But I do not see the east window, or the north transept, and but very little of the west end of the building. It seems to me that three sides of the church are wanting."

"Of course," answered Mary, as she partly guessed his meaning, "it must be so, for the view is taken from the south."

"So, Mary," said Mr. Mertoun, "the view of life in the story is necessarily taken from one particular point. It looks upon it, as it were, towards the side of wealth. There are other sides no less important to the symmetry of the building, but they cannot all be introduced into the same picture. I have yet another question to ask:—Do you suppose that the person who sketched this drawing drew a plan of the foundation of the church before he began it?"

"Nay," replied Mary; "you cannot be serious in asking."

"Well, then," continued Mr. Mertoun, "in this respect also it is an imperfect picture. The real walls undoubtedly have a foundation, and the building could not stand an instant if it were not there. Do you see my meaning, Leonard?"

"I do," he answered; "you mean, that the death of our Saviour is the foundation on which the walls of our actual life rest; and that, though it be not represented in the story, it is, of course, assumed to be there."

"Exactly so," said Mr. Mertoun; "and I wish you to mark clearly the distinction between this illustration and the

former. The several duties of life are like the different walls of the building, which may be brought out in greater or less distinctness, according to the point from which we view it. The doctrine of the atonement is to the Christian as the one foundation on which they rest, and without it the picture could not be really faithful, for the building itself would cease to exist. But to return to the duty of almsgiving. Can you tell me any passage in Holy Scripture in which it is insisted upon to the apparent exclusion of others? You were mentioning, Mary, the Parable of the Talents. Do you remember the description of the Day of Judgment which follows it?" [1]

Mary reflected a moment, and then answered, "Those on the King's right hand were rewarded, because they had fed the hungry, given drink to the thirsty, and received the stranger."

"They were so," said Mr. Mertoun; "and our Blessed Lord assured them, that inasmuch as they had done this unto one of the least of His brethren, they had done it unto Himself. In like manner, those on the King's left hand are represented as being punished simply for neglect of the poor. There are also two parables concerning rich men, in which the same view is brought no less distinctly before us."

"One of them," said Leonard, "is that of the Rich Man and Lazarus." [2]

"It is so," answered his uncle; "no other sin of the rich man is there pointed out to us but that of neglecting the poor beggar who lay at his door. The other parable to

[1] St. Matthew xxv. 34, 35. [2] St. Luke xvi. 19-31.

which I referred is that of the Rich Man, who, when his ground brought forth plentifully, determined to hoard the produce.[1] God punished him with the immediate sentence of death. And our Saviour Himself has annexed to it the warning, 'So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God.'"

"Children," observed Leonard, "are never very rich."

The words were spoken in a low tone, as though in answer to his own thoughts. His uncle, however, did not let them pass unnoticed. "They are not," he replied, "according to the ordinary meaning of the word wealth. But recollect how the mite of the poor widow was pronounced by our Blessed Lord to be more than all the costly gifts which were cast into the treasury by the rich. Now the youngest child may either give a like offering to that of the widow, or he may hoard it up, or spend it on himself."

"And if he does hoard it up," asked Leonard, "will he be like Philargyr?"

"Not, I trust," answered Mr. Mertoun, "such as he was in the end of his career. But his bonds were, at first, light and flexible; it was time that added to them their weight and strength; and such bonds are often worn in secret by children. They are by no means free from the temptation to avarice. The apparently slight opportunities they have for its indulgence render it less perceptible, but not less dangerous. There is no need of a gold mine to foster it. The first trifling coin a child receives is often formed into the first link of the chain that binds him in after years. If

[1] St. Luke xii. 16-21.

it be followed by the love of money for its own sake, and the wish for more, he is already beginning to share the servitude of Philargyr."

The children were silent. The words awakened no painful thoughts in Mary, for avarice was not one of her failings. But Leonard felt the full force of this application of the story. The gift which he had received from his uncle the preceding Christmas had been hoarded up in secret, and was loved because it was gold. At length he asked in what way the fault of avarice might be cured.

Mr. Mertoun guessed the motive of the question, and replied, "The best remedy for all our faults, my dear boy, is to make them the subject of continual prayer. But this, perhaps, more than any other, requires the resistance of an immediate effort. The conquering it is really like the breaking of a chain. Once summon resolution to give, and it seems as though some spell were dissolved, and the disposition to give more abundantly will follow. I do not mean that the temptation to save will not again come back; but it will return after each defeat with less violence than before, until at length it will be subdued altogether by the habit of giving. You must not, however, forget that the hoarding up our money is not the only abuse of the talent of wealth; the spending it on improper objects is one no-less dangerous; and I believe that children in general are more frequently tempted to follow the path of Megacles than that of Philargyr."

"Of Megacles, uncle!" said Mary, in some surprise; "I had fancied that his sin was ambition, and not extravagance."

"It was so," said Mr. Mertoun, "but he may be taken as representing a yet larger class. His history brings especially before us the folly of wasting on some mere earthly object those riches which might be laid up in the treasury of Heaven. To do this is, in reality, extravagance. It matters not, to use the language of the story, whether we build with them mere villas of Pleasure or towers of Fame. Children, who spend what they have on self-gratification to the neglect of the poor, are beginning to follow the course of Megacles."

"But can they be also like him in his ambition?" asked Mary.

"Undoubtedly," answered her uncle; "but the ways in which they can purchase this species of self-gratification are so apparently trivial, that you may have some difficulty in tracing the resemblance. Perhaps the spending money on finery or anything else intended to excite the admiration of their companions, is their nearest approach to the particular sin of Megacles. But is it not said at the conclusion of the story, that Euprepes, also, had in secret been raising a tower?"

"It is," answered Mary; "and it means, that while professing to relieve the poor, he was, like Megacles, merely seeking the applause of his fellow-citizens."

"This, then," continued Mr. Mertoun, "is a kind of ambition to which children are peculiarly exposed. There is no way in which they can purchase applause so readily as by giving to the poor. Each act of benevolence is sure to be accompanied by a certain amount of praise. And yet

if they make that the prevailing motive for their gift, they have their recompense upon earth, and will forfeit it in Heaven. Do you remember the warning which our Saviour gave His disciples on this subject?"

"He told them," answered Mary, "that if they did their alms before men, to be seen of them, they would have no reward of their Father in Heaven."

"Yes," continued Mr. Mertoun, "and He added the precept—'When thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: that thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father Which seeth in secret, Himself shall reward thee openly.'[1] Is there any difficulty suggested to you by these words?"

"I was wishing to ask," said Leonard, "whether they mean that we are to make a secret of everything that we give."

"They cannot mean that," answered Mr. Mertoun, "for our Lord has also told us to let our light so shine before men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father Which is in Heaven.[2] By the command, 'not to let our left hand know what our right hand doeth,' we must understand, that we ought to shrink even from any feeling of self-satisfaction at our own good deeds, and, of course, yet more to avoid the applause of the world. But we cannot help actually knowing what we ourselves give, and at times it is our duty to let others know it also."

"And yet," observed Mary, "if we do this are we not really giving our alms before men?"

[1] St. Matthew vi. 3, 4. [2] St. Matthew v. 16.

"Yes," replied Mr. Mertoun, "but not necessarily in order to be seen of them. It is the giving with this object that is forbidden by our Blessed Lord. Almsgiving is no easy duty, and children especially require the advice of others in the manner of its performance. They cannot even find out for themselves proper objects of benevolence. They may, therefore, ask to be taught how to give, and place their offerings in the hands of their friends, and yet look for no other recompense than that which is promised to them in Heaven. Do you remember, Mary, how, when you were a little child, your mother would come to hear you say your prayers, and yet you did not say them in order to be heard of her: she taught you to pray, but the words were addressed to God. Do you understand me?"

"I think so," she replied; "but will there be no difference at all between children who give merely that their friends may praise them and those who give from right motives?"

"Perhaps, at times, there may be no visible difference," answered Mr. Mertoun, "but there must always be a real one. Recollect, that when it is said, 'Which seeth in secret,' it does not mean only that God sees into the secret chamber, but into the secret thoughts of the heart. He can read clearly and distinctly the exact motive of every gift; and as those which profess to be studiously concealed, may in their very concealment proceed from ostentation, so also those which are openly given, may, in His sight, be as the silent offerings of Sophron."

But Mary was not yet quite satisfied. "I know, uncle,"

she said, "that we must try to be like Sophron in the motive of our alms; but cannot children be in any way like him in the manner of giving them?"

"Yes," answered Mr. Mertoun, "they may be like him in this also, though the resemblance is an imperfect one. They may avoid all unnecessary display; or again, they may conceal what they have already given, or the inward struggle by which the gift is accompanied, or the self-denial which it costs them. All this is as a secret store, which adds to the value of our offerings in the sight of God, if we look for our recompense to Him alone. But it is difficult to lay down any exact rule. The line which, as I have said, is purposely kept distinct and separate in the story, often seems perplexed and difficult, when we try to trace it through the conflicting circumstances of life. I think, however, that you will seldom find any practical difficulty. While we walk along our appointed path, though we cannot see far into the distance, each separate step is for the most part sufficiently clear. Only keep distinctly in your remembrance that the poor are sent to you by God—that it cannot be right to hoard up your money, or spend it on your own gratifications, while you do nothing to relieve their wants—and that your offerings must be made for Christ's sake, and without the hope of any earthly recompense—and the story of the King's Messengers will not have been told you in vain. The events of your own daily life will best enable you to apply it to yourselves."

With the exception of a single question, Leonard had been

a silent listener to the close of the conversation. He did not seem to participate in the difficulties of his sister. When, however, the usual time came for the children to retire to rest, he appeared anxious to remain behind; but Mary called him, and he accompanied her. Mr. Mertoun was left alone. He had seen that the child was impressed by the story, but his joy at this circumstance was checked by the remembrance that in a little while the feelings awakened by it would pass away. His thoughts were interrupted by a light footstep at the door; the handle was softly turned, and Leonard entered, alone. There was something in his hand which glittered, and this he gave his uncle, with a few whispered words. The tear rose to Mr. Mertoun's eyes, as he replied, "God bless you, my dear nephew; you have indeed found out the true moral to my story. Go on as you have begun, and your path will be clear." The offering which the boy gave was the long-hoarded gold; and the whispered words were, "For the Messenger of the Great King who came this morning to your door."

THE END.

Printed by R. & R. CLARK, LIMITED, *Edinburgh*

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